

Do students sometimes not understand what you are saying, particularly at low levels? This lesson will help you to pinpoint problems with your classroom language and look at ways of making it clearer.

Task 1 – Andy’s Feedback

Andy used to have a problem of speaking too quickly and students found him difficult to understand. He has worked hard at trying to slow down his speech, but students have told him that they still have problems understanding his instructions and explanations.



Can you help Andy? What do you think the problem is?

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



Task 1 Feedback

While the speed of Andy’s delivery may have improved, he is probably still using language that is too difficult for his students. He may also be using more language than he needs.

Key Skill

Teachers should use language in the classroom that is clear and natural. It should be simple enough for students to understand, but not too simplified so that it becomes ungrammatical or condescending. Teachers need to make sure they do not use more language than is necessary with students.

Task 2 – Problems with instructions



Numbers 1 to 8 are all examples of problematic teacher language. After each example, there are two problems. Which of the two problems best describes the example?

✓ **Tick the statement you think is correct.**

1. “I want you all to get up on your feet and hitch up with someone other than your mate next to you...”

- a) The teacher uses more words than necessary.
- b) There is too much colloquial language in these instructions.

2. “Just imagine if you might be an astronaut visiting the space station.”

- a): There is too much hypothetical language that is unnecessary.
- b) The use of ‘just’ is unnecessary.

3. “Then together talking – many words – happy class.”

- a) The teacher is too specific about the language output for the activity.
- a) The teacher over-simplifies her language and is speaking in an unnatural pidgin.

4. “The ideas espoused by group 1 are very interesting.”

- a) The teacher uses a word that is overly formal.
- b) The first noun phrase in the sentence is too long.

5. “I was wondering if you could all work in pairs and then would you mind talking about the picture.”

- a) The teacher uses too much unnecessary polite language.
- b) There is too much hypothetical language that is unclear.

6. “I’m just writing up a question on the white board and I want you to ... there we go I’ve finished ... yes, you should answer the question that I’ve written up.”

- a) The teacher mixes the present progressive with the present simple and this is confusing.
- b) The teacher narrates their activity and uses more language than is necessary.

7. “So how was your weekend? Did you have a good time? Oh and I’d do task one first. I had a great weekend.”

- a) The teacher mixes social language with instructional language and this is confusing for students.
- b) The teacher narrates their activity and hides the instructions amongst the narration.

8. “Those two clauses have a hypotactic relationship.”

- a) The 2 noun phrases in this sentence are too complex.
- b) The grammar terminology used in this explanation would probably be too sophisticated for many learners.

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Key Skill

To make your teacher language clear, it helps to avoid the following: language that is very colloquial, language that is very polite, language that is rarely used or is very technical. Two other things to avoid are: narrating what you’re doing and mixing different types of language (explanation vs. instruction).

Task 3 – Instructions and gestures



Sometimes it helps to use gestures when talking to students. Look at the examples of teacher language below and decide whether you would use gestures or not. Circle 'Y' for yes and 'N' for no. If you choose 'yes', describe the kind of gesture you would use.

Instructions	Gesture?	Describe your gesture
1. Talk together in pairs.	Y N	
2. Fill in the gaps in exercise one.	Y N	
3. Move around the room and talk to as many people as possible.	Y N	
4. Listen and complete exercise 2.	Y N	
5. Those in group A should sit on the left and those in group B should sit on the right.	Y N	
6. You've got 5 minutes to finish.	Y N	
7. Stand up and find the picture that matches your text.	Y N	
8. Read the text and complete the True / False questions.	Y N	

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Key Skill

A good way of reducing the amount of teacher talk you need to use is by using gesture and body language. It can also help support what you are saying and makes your language clearer for learners.

Task 4 – Making your instructions clear



The following examples of teacher language are unclear in one way or another. Rewrite them so that they are clear. The feedback provides *suggested* answers and variation is possible. 🗝️

Teacher language

1. Have a chat to your partner.
2. If you were a journalist ...
3. Time's just about up.
4. How about maybe getting into groups.
5. Check out if you were right at the back of the book.
6. Listen and work out if you've more or less got the hang of it.
7. If you could just pop the word in the right place.
8. Just have a read and jot down some of the core arguments.
9. Don't take forever – just whip through them.
10. What I want you to do is just get into pairs and have a look at what each other has got.

Thinking about your teaching ...

A good way to check your own instructional language is by taking a tape recorder to the classroom and recording yourself giving instructions. After the lesson, write out a transcript of some of your instructional sequences and analyse it to see if any of problems noted in task 2 are present in your teacher language.

Note your conclusions in your *Teaching Log*.

Taking it to the classroom ...

An interesting challenge you can set yourself (and it can be intriguing and fun for your students) is to try teaching for half an hour or an hour without talking at all and trying to mime things. You may need to write the odd word on the white board. This will give you an insight into how little it is possible to say some times with learners. Note how much more language they produce in order to fill the silence.

Want to find out more ... ?

On pages 116 - 118 of *The Practice of English Language Teaching* (4th edition) by Jeremy Harmer (Pearson 2007), there is further reading on how teachers can help students hear and understand language.

On pages 95 - 96 of *Learning Teaching* (2nd edition) by Jim Scrivener (Macmillan 2005), there is further reading on using gesture in the classroom.

Related TaskBook lessons...

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

- **Unit 2 c) Giving instructions:** *Learn how to plan and give effective instructions in the classroom.*
- **Unit 2 b) Questioning techniques:** *Learn how teachers can effectively use questions not only to check instructions, but also to check learning.*

Answer Key

**Task 2 – Feedback**

- | | |
|-------|-------|
| 1. b) | 5. a) |
| 2. a) | 6. b) |
| 3. b) | 7. a) |
| 4. a) | 8. b) |

Task 3 – Feedback

- Talk together in pairs. Gesture: Yes.*
Describe gesture: The teacher points to each pair with both hands.
- Fill in the gaps in exercise 1. Gesture: No.* However, the teacher could hold up the book or worksheet and indicate the correct exercise.
- Move around the room and talk to as many people as possible. Gesture: Yes.*
Describe gesture: The teacher makes circular arm movements to suggest mingling.
- Listen and complete exercise 2. Gesture: No.* However, the teacher could cup one hand behind an ear to indicate listening.
- Those in group A should sit on the left and those in group B on the right. Gesture: Yes.* Describe gesture: The teacher points to the parts of the room where the people in each group should go.
- You've got 5 minutes to finish. Gesture: Yes.* Describe gesture: The teacher holds up a splayed hand – five fingers represent 5 minutes.
- Stand up and find the picture that matches your text. Gesture: Yes.*
Describe gesture: The teacher raises her hands to indicate standing up, then points to two or three pictures in the room.
- Read the text and complete the True / False questions. Gesture: No.* However,

the teacher could hold up the book or worksheet and indicate the correct text and task.

Task 4 – Feedback

- Have a chat to your partner.
Rewrite: *Talk to you partner.*
- If you were a journalist ...
Rewrite: *You are a journalist. (Or: Imagine you are a journalist.)*
- Time's just about up.
Rewrite: *It's almost time to stop / to finish. (Or: 30 seconds to go)*
- How about maybe getting into groups.
Rewrite: *Please get into groups of ...*
- Check out if you were right at the back of the book.
Rewrite: *Look at the answers on page X of the book.*
- Listen and work out if you've more or less got the hang of it.
Rewrite: *Listen for gist to get a general understanding.*
- If you could just pop the words in the right place.
Rewrite: *Put the words in the correct place.*
- Just have a read and jot down some of the core arguments.
Rewrite: *Read and write down the main ideas in the text.*
- Don't take forever – just whip through them.
Rewrite: *Don't spend too much time on them – do them quickly.*

10. What I want you to do is just get into pairs and have a look at what each other has got.

Rewrite: *Please get into pairs and look at your partner's answers.*



This work is published under the *Creative Commons 3.0 New Zealand Attribution Non-commercial Share Alike Licence (BY-NC-SA)*. Under this licence you are free to copy, distribute, display and perform the work as well as to remix, tweak, and build upon this work noncommercially, as long as you credit the author/s and license your new creations under the identical terms.

Do you question your students a lot? Is it a good idea to use questions in the classroom? This lesson will help you find out about questions as learning tools.

Task 1 – Kate’s question.

Kate was teaching a group of pre intermediate students the other day. She gave them these instructions and asked them a question afterwards:

Kate: ‘I want all the students who are letter A to stand over here and all those who are letter B to stand over there. Then I want you to find a partner from the other group and talk to each other using the questionnaires and make notes on your partner’s answers and then go back into your original group and tell each other about the answers you got. And then you should order them from the most to the least interesting.’


Kate: “OK? Do you understand?”

Students: [Silence]

Kate: ”Do you understand?”

One student: “Yes” [very quietly]



Why are the students reluctant to answer? Do you think they understand? Jot your ideas on a note pad, then check the answer key below 

Task 1 Feedback

Kate’s instructions are quite long and complicated and the students’ silence probably means they don’t understand them, at least not completely, and this makes them reluctant to answer. The students who eventually answer ‘yes’ may have understood the instructions, but they could just be saying ‘yes’ to save face or because they think that if they say ‘no’, they will invite more difficult questioning from Kate. The problem is that Kate’s question does not give her a clear indication of whether her students have understood or not.

Key skill

Questions are a useful teaching tool in the English language classroom because they increase student participation in the lesson. It can also mean that teachers become less reliant on very long explanations, which can be difficult for students to understand. Questions can be 'open' (i.e. the question begins with a 'wh-' word like 'what' or 'where') or they can be closed (i.e. a question that you can answer with 'yes' or 'no'). Questions can also be 'display' (the teacher knows the answer) or 'referential' (the teacher doesn't know the answer).

Task 2 – The questions we use



Letters a to f are example teacher questions. Match them to the categories 1 to 6 below.

Teacher questions

- a. Do we know exactly when the action happened in the past?
- b. So are you going to talk to one student or many students?
- c. What's a word that means very, very tired?
- d. Did anyone go to the movies at the weekend?
- e. Who knows who invented the worldwide web?
- f. So does a 'burglar' steal from banks or only from people's homes?

Categories	Teacher questions
1. eliciting language	
2. eliciting information	
3. checking classroom instructions	
4. checking a vocabulary concept	
5. checking a grammar concept	
6. social or personal	

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Key Skill

There are many opportunities for teachers to use questions effectively during different stages of a lesson. Used appropriately, questioning keeps the students engaged and involved and helps to keep up the pace of the lesson.

Task 3 – Some problems with questions



In a to e below there is a description of problems that teachers can have when asking their students questions. Match the problems to the scenarios 1 to 5 below.

Scenarios	Problems
<p>1. Teacher: So what kind of food do you eat for dinner in your family (2 seconds later) OK. Not sure? Not to worry.</p>	
<p>2. Teacher: OK, so first of all student A runs outside the classroom and reads a sentence and then comes back in. Student B then writes down what student A says, then its student B's turn to go outside. And they do the same thing. All right? OK, so Paulo, what do you have to do?</p>	
<p>3. Teacher: You might like to answer then and tell me where you're likely to find something like "rubbish"?</p>	
<p>4. Teacher: So you see this diagram on the white board – the one at the top with the little wiggly line. So do you think that's the present perfect, or is it this one with the little crosses on it?</p>	
<p>5. Teacher: So are you going to do the exercise or are you going to listen to the radio?</p>	

Problems

- a. The answer to the question is too long and unmanageable for students.
- b. The answer to the question is so obvious it is not worth asking the question.
- c. The teacher does not wait long enough for the answer to the question.
- d. The teacher uses unnecessary language. She could probably just point to what is on the white board.
- e. The teacher could simplify her language in the question.

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Key Skill

Just asking questions is not enough. Teachers need to think carefully about what kinds of questions they ask and how they ask them. Questions should be easy for students to understand and they should have short, manageable answers. Teachers need to give students a little thinking time and not expect them to answer questions immediately.

Task 4 – Asking questions about language



Letters a to h below are labels for different questions that can check students' understanding of language. Some refer to vocabulary, while others refer to grammar. Match the labels to the questions 1 to 8 below.

Labels

- a. Checking the meaning of a new word.
- b. Checking the register (level of formality) of a new word.
- c. Checking the collocation of a word – the way it goes together with another word.
- d. Checking the connotation of a word – whether it has a positive or negative meaning.
- e. Checking the time reference of a grammar structure.
- f. Checking the probability of a grammar structure
- g. Checking the duration of a grammar structure.
- h. Checking the function (e.g. giving advice) of an utterance.

ESOL Teaching Skills TaskBook

Questioning techniques: Unit 2 b)

Questions	Labels
1. If we say someone is “pretentious” is that good or bad?	
2. Can we say “make my homework”?	
3. Is a “reward” something you buy or something that a person gives you?	
4. Is he saying that it’s necessary or only that it’s a good idea?	
5. Did he do that once or more than once?	
6. Can you use this word when you are talking to your boss? What about your friends?	
7. Are we sure it happened or do we only think it’s possible that it happened?	
8. Did the action happen at a definite time in the past?	

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Thinking about your teaching ...

Record some of your lessons with a tape recorder and analyse how much time you spend explaining things to students and how much time you spend questioning them. Do you explain too much? How long does it take for students to answer your questions? Are your questions easy to understand?

Note your observations in your Teaching Log.

Taking it to the classroom ...

Whenever you think you need to give your students a reasonably long explanation for something, think about turning part of the explanation into a series of questions that guide students to an understanding of whatever it is you are focusing on. It might help to plan these questions until such time as you feel confident about asking them spontaneously in the classroom.

Want to find out more ... ?

In *The Self-directed Teacher* by David Nunan and Clarice Lamb (Cambridge University Press, 1996), there is further reading on using questions in English language classrooms.

See also section 2 of *Language Teaching Classroom Practice DVD & Workbook* by Heather Richards and Karen Wise (AUT University 2007).

Answer Key



Task 2 – Feedback

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

Task 3 – Feedback

1. **Problem: c.** The teacher does not wait long enough for the answer to the question.
2. **Problem: a.** The answer to the question is too long and unmanageable for students.
3. **Problem: e.** The teacher could simplify her language in the question.
4. **Problem: d.** The teacher uses unnecessary language. She could probably just point to what is in the white board.
5. **Problem: b.** The answer to the question is so obvious it is not worth asking the question.

Task 4 – Feedback

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



This work is published under the *Creative Commons 3.0 New Zealand Attribution Non-commercial Share Alike Licence* (BY-NC-SA). Under this licence you are free to copy, distribute, display and perform the work as well as to remix, tweak, and build upon this work noncommercially, as long as you credit the author/s and license your new creations under the identical terms.

When you set up activities, do your students sometimes look confused? This lesson will help you sort this out.

Task 1 – Simon’s instructions

Simon is teaching a group of pre intermediate students.

Simon: ‘So what I would like you to do is this. First of all, I’d like you to imagine you’re a waiter. Well, that’s student A. If you were the waiter what would you do? And student B if you were the customer what would you say? Oh that’s right, guys, you’ll all need to look at the menu. Actually you both will. OK, so you do that and talk together. All right? OK, so what do you have to do?’

Students: [silence]



Write answers to the questions below.

- a. Do you think Simon’s instructions are clear and easy to understand?
- b. Can you improve Simon’s instructions? Rewrite them on a piece of paper.
- c. What grammar and vocabulary changes did you make to Simon’s instructions?

Then check the answer key below. 

Task 1 Feedback

a. No, they are likely to be difficult for pre intermediate level learners. Simon realises at the end he needs to check his instructions and this is a positive thing. However, his way of checking is asking students to repeat the whole instruction sequence and this is difficult.

b. There are many possible ways of rewriting Simon’s instructions. The following example would be easier for students to understand:

Simon: OK, student A – you are all waiters. Student B – you are all customers. So who are the waiters? [the A’s raise their hands] And who are the customers? [the Bs raise their hands] Great! All the waiters and all the customers read the menu. Customers - think about what you are going to say. Waiters, think about what you will reply. Now, what will you do first, read the menu or speak?

Task 1 Feedback (cont'd)

c. The example in answer b has no grammar and vocabulary associated with an imaginary situation. For example, *if you were the waiter ...*, *...imagine ...* It also has no unnecessary polite language *I'd like you to ...* and it has no redundancies such as *I mean...*, *actually...*, *guys...*

Key Skill

When teachers can give clear instructions, learners feel more secure in the lesson. It also means learners can begin tasks more quickly, which increases time for learning.

Task 2 – Hints for giving clear instructions



Look at each pair of sentences and choose the one that is TRUE.

Sentences

- a) You should use polite language otherwise students will get offended.

b) You should use simple language so the instructions are clear.
- a) You shouldn't do a demonstration because it takes far too much time.

b) You should do a demonstration so students can see the activity in action.
- a) You should use questions to check key aspects of the instructions.

b) You should use questions to check all aspects of the instructions.
- a) You should hold up worksheets when giving instructions so that students look at you.

b) You should hand out worksheets and then give instructions so students can read what they have to do.
- a) You shouldn't use gesture as this will distract students from what you are saying.

b) You should use gesture because visual information can support what you are saying.
- a) You should never use the OHP (overhead projector) to help you give instructions because it is awkward and it is really a bit like cheating if you do.

b) You could sometimes use an OHP to help you give instructions because you can show a transparency of a worksheet clearly to your learners.

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Key Skill

It is helpful for students if teachers plan their instructions. Good instructions use simple language and are often supported by clear gestures or demonstrations. The whiteboard or OHP may also be used to help give instructions. Remember to ask questions to check your students have understood the instructions correctly.

Task 3 – Getting instructions in the right order



Put the teacher actions a – f in the left-hand column in the correct order 1-6, so that you create a clear and logical instruction sequence.

Teacher actions	Order [1- 6]
a. give instructions	
b. hand out the work sheet	
c. hold up the work sheet	
d. gesture the interaction pattern to be used (e.g. work in pairs)	
e. get the students' attention	
f. check the instructions	

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Key Skill

In class, before you begin giving your instructions, ensure that all the students are looking at and listening to you. It's important not give out the worksheet too early otherwise you will lose your students attention. Only give out the worksheet once you have finished giving and checking your instructions.

Task 4 – Checking instructions



Each number below 1 – 6 is a learning activity. After each activity, there are 2 questions a) and b) that could be used to check the instructions. One question is effective, but the other is not. Choose the question that you think is most effective.

<u>Learning activities</u>	<u>Questions to check instructions</u>
1. role play	<p>a) Are you going to write or speak together?</p> <p>b) Who speaks first?</p>
2. mingle	<p>a) Do you ask your partner or other students?</p> <p>b) Do you mingle around?</p>
3. gist reading	<p>a) Are you going to read or listen?</p> <p>b) How much time have you got?</p>
4. information gap activity	<p>a) Are you going to show your sheet to each other?</p> <p>b) So what are you going to talk about?</p>
5. gap fill	<p>a) Are you going to fill in the gap?</p> <p>b) Do you use only one word or more than one word?</p>
6. dictation	<p>a) How many times will I read the text?</p> <p>b) Who is going to write down the words?</p>

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Thinking about your teaching ...

Think about the last time you gave instructions for a more complicated activity, for example, a mingle activity or a split reading and feedback task. Did it go well? Did your students begin the task promptly? Why or why not?

Make a list of ideas and record these in your *Teaching Log*.

Taking it to the classroom ...

If you are interested in finding out if your instructions are effective, you can record yourself during the lesson and transcribe your instruction sequences. It is interesting to note what language you use and whether you can improve this or not.

Want to find out more ... ?

On pages 90 to 92 of *Learning Teaching (2nd edition)* by Jim Scrivener (Macmillan 2005), there is further reading on giving instructions.

Related TaskBook lessons...

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

- **Unit 2 a) Teacher language:** Learn how teachers can use language in the classroom that is clear and natural.
- **Unit 2 b) Questioning techniques:** Learn how teachers can effectively use questions not only to check instructions, but also to check learning.

Answer Key

**Task 2 – Feedback**

1. **b)** You should use simple language so the instructions are clear. - **TRUE**

Comment: *If you are too polite, you may end up using complicated language that is difficult to understand.*

2. **b)** You should do a demonstration so students can see the activity in action. - **TRUE**

Comment: *Doing an example is a very concrete way of giving instructions.*

3. **a)** You should use questions to check key aspects of the instructions. - **TRUE**

Comment: *If part of your instructions are obvious, for example, “work in pairs”, then it is not necessary to check this aspect of the activity. Check aspects that are more confusing for students.*

4. **a)** You should hold up worksheets when giving instructions so that students look at you. - **TRUE**

Comment: *If you give out worksheets too soon, students start reading them and stop listening to your instructions.*

5. **b)** You should use gesture because it is visual information that supports what you are saying. – **TRUE**

Comment: *Any visual information you can add is always useful for students.*

6. **b)** You could use an OHP to help you give instructions sometimes because you can show a transparency of a worksheet clearly to your learners. – **TRUE**

Comment: *Showing students a worksheet on an OHP can make the instructions clearer. It also means that students look at you and listen to you when you give the instructions.*

Task 3 – Feedback

1. **e**

2. **c**

3. **a**

4. **d**

5. **f**

6. **b**

Task 4 – Feedback

1. **role play b)** Who speaks first?

Comment: *The first question is obvious. The second question is useful because students often don't know who should begin a conversation in a role play and this question is a good reminder.*

2. **mingle a)** Do you ask your partner or other students?

Comment: *The word ‘mingle’ may not be understood by some students. The language in question a) is clearer.*

3. **gist reading b)** How much time have you got?

Comment: *The first question is too obvious. Question b) reminds students that they should read quickly for gist as they have a time limit.*

4. **information gap activity a)** Are you going to show your sheet to each other?

Comment: *Question b) is too open-ended. Question a) checks a key aspect of information gap activities.*

5. **gap fill b)** Do you use only one word or more than one word?

Comment: *Question a) is too obvious. Question b) can be an important instruction to check for a gap fill task as some of these tasks restrict the choice to one word.*

6. **dictation a)** How many times will I read the text?

Comment: *Question b) is too obvious. However, it is useful to remind students of the number of times you will read a dictation text.*



This work is published under the *Creative Commons 3.0 New Zealand Attribution Non-commercial Share Alike Licence* (BY-NC-SA). Under this licence you are free to copy, distribute, display and perform the work as well as to remix, tweak, and build upon this work noncommercially, as long as you credit the author/s and license your new creations under the identical terms.

Do you sometimes worry that your lesson might be too fast or too slow for your students? This lesson can help you find out if that's true and what you can do about it.

Task 1 – Test yourself



Answer 'yes' or 'no' to the following questions:

Do you like to ...

- | | |
|--|----------|
| ... wait for the last student to finish an activity before doing feedback? | Yes / No |
| ... explain language points in a good level of detail? | Yes / No |
| ... help as many students as much as possible when monitoring? | Yes / No |
| ... always do teacher-controlled feedback? | Yes / No |

Now check your answers in the key below. 

Task 1 Feedback

If you answered 'yes' to 2 or more of the questions in task 1, you might have a problem with pace in your lesson. It could be a bit slow and sometimes, your students might get bored.

Key skill

Pace will vary according to different stages of the lesson. However, it is important that teachers are aware of how variations in pace can affect their learners' motivation and learning.

Task 2 – Bored or rushed students?



Look at teacher actions a to j. Some actions can make students feel bored in a lesson, while other actions will make them feel rushed. Place the actions into the correct column in the table below.

Teacher actions

- a. You teach to the level of the weakest student in the class.
- b. You often can't find your plan and materials and get a bit lost in the lesson.
- c. You stick rigidly to time limits you set. It doesn't matter whether students have finished the activity or not.
- d. You immediately nominate a second student when the first student can't answer a question.
- e. You like to use the same kind of materials in your lessons because you know what works best.
- f. You do really lively drills to keep students' energy up.
- g. You give instructions as you hand out worksheets.
- h. You give students a lot of time to answer open class questions.
- i. You don't let students ask questions about activities after doing feedback.
- j. You wait for students to read all of a worksheet and then give instructions for the activity.

Bored students	Rushed students

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Key skill

Maintaining an appropriate learning pace for a group of students is a key part of good classroom management. If students feel bored or rushed in any way, they don't learn as well as they could.

Task 3 – What else can affect pace?



Below are some other factors that can make the pace of a lesson feel too slow. Why do you think they do this?

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

Factors that can make the pace feel too slow

- a. Monitoring students.
- b. Teacher talk.
- c. Dominant student.
- d. Teacher's personal style.
- e. Student interaction patterns.

Key skill

The answers in task 3 show the degree to which the teacher often controls the pace of a lesson. It might be useful to imagine that you are like the conductor of an orchestra and be aware that your interventions will affect the rate of learning in any lesson.

Task 4 – Ways to find a better pace



Letters a to j describe a problem associated with pace. Numbers 1 to 10 are strategies that can help deal with these problems. They are not in the same order. Match the strategies to a problem.

Problems with pace	Strategies
a. You think you talk too much to students.	
b. You let activities continue for too long.	
c. You get stuck with students when monitoring.	
d. You always get your students to work in the same pairs.	
e. You let one student dominate the lesson.	
f. You stick rigidly to time limits.	
g. You teach to the weak learners in the class.	
h. You think your personal style is too fast or slow.	
i. Your open class feedback sometimes goes on for too long.	
j. You think your materials are always the same.	

Strategies that can help with pace

1. When planning lessons, think about using a variety of interaction patterns: pairs, small groups, mingle activities. During the lesson, change pairs frequently.
2. Make a conscious effort to use alternative materials – once a week if teaching full-time, once a month if teaching part-time.
3. Monitor student-centred activities more carefully. Do feedback when most, but not all, students have finished.
4. Record yourself to see if it is true. If so, try using student-centred discovery tasks to help you get ideas across to students.
5. You can give feedback on some answers to a task when monitoring. In open class feedback, deal only with the questions students found more difficult.
6. If you think this is happening in the lesson, go immediately to whole group feedback. What you were explaining to one pair might be useful to all students.
7. If you are worried about this, invite a colleague you trust to observe one of your classes and give you feedback on this.
8. Monitor students carefully and check their real progress on a task. If it's taking them longer than you thought, be flexible and allow them more time.
9. Teach to a middle level of ability in your group. If necessary, deal with weaker students' questions when monitoring or after class.
10. Nominate other students and politely ask the enthusiastic student to let other students contribute. If necessary, talk to the problem student after class.

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Thinking about your teaching ...

Sometimes the pace of the lesson can be created by the learners. Try keeping a record of lessons that felt fast-paced to you and those that felt slower. Note the time of day, day in the week and anything else that might have affected your students' pace. Also make a note of what kind of materials you use. After about 10 or more lessons, see if you can note any patterns in this information.

Note your conclusions in your *Teaching Log*.

Taking it to the classroom ...

Try getting feedback on the pace of your lessons directly from your students. At the end of each lesson ask them if the lesson was too slow, too fast or about right. If you do this, you will need to expect some negative feedback, but it might help you to keep your students happier in the long term.

Want to find out more ... ?

On pages 153 to 160 of *The Practice of English Language Teaching (4th edition)* by Jeremy Harmer (Pearson 2007), there is reading on problem behaviour of students which looks at issues such as boredom and dominant students, and how to manage these successfully.

Answer Key



Task 2 – Feedback

bored students	rushed students
<p>a. You teach to the level of the weakest student in the class. Comment: <i>This will be too slow for the majority of students in the class.</i></p>	<p>c. You stick rigidly to time limits you set. It doesn't matter whether students have finished the activity or not. Comment: <i>Your estimated time limits may not always be correct and students might need extra time.</i></p>
<p>b. You often can't find your plan and materials and get a bit lost in the lesson. Comment: <i>This can take time and it makes you look disorganised to the students.</i></p>	<p>d. You immediately nominate a second student when the first student can't answer a question. Comment: <i>You are perhaps not giving the first student enough thinking time to come up with an answer.</i></p>
<p>e. You like to use the same kind of materials in your lessons because you know what works best. Comment: <i>This can be very repetitive and students feel they are always doing the same old thing.</i></p>	<p>f. You do really lively drills to keep students' energy up. Comment: <i>The drills might be too lively and weaker students can't hear or understand the words or phrases they are being asked to repeat.</i></p>
<p>h. You give students a lot of time to ask open class questions. Comment: <i>This can drag on and sometimes it is only the weak student(s) who asks(s) questions.</i></p>	<p>g. You give instructions as you hand out worksheets. Comment: <i>Students will probably feel pressure because they are trying to understand your oral instructions and make sense of the worksheet at the same time.</i></p>
<p>j. You wait for students to read all of a worksheet and then give instructions for the activity. Comment: <i>Some students will be quite slow at reading and the faster readers will often have to wait for them to finish.</i></p>	<p>i. You don't let students ask questions about activities after doing feedback. Comment: <i>The students' questions could be important to their learning.</i></p>

Answer Key (Cont'd)



Task 3 - Feedback

a. Monitoring students

Answer: *There are 2 possibilities here. First the teacher may not monitor enough in order to find out students' progress on a task. She may let tasks go on for too long. Secondly, the teacher might spend too much time with one student or one group of students and the others get bored waiting for her.*

b. Teacher talk

Answer: *If the teacher talks too much, the students might not understand what she is saying and switch off. Students can only process a limited amount of explanation in a second language. Often it is better to get them working on discovery tasks.*

c. Dominant student

Answer: *The student may demand a lot of the teacher's attention and ask a lot of questions that are not relevant to the group as a whole. This is boring and sometimes frustrating for the other students.*

d. Teacher's personal style

Answer: *Some teachers speak too slowly and do not vary their voice enough.*

e. Student interaction patterns

Answer: *If the teacher always uses the same interaction pattern (e.g. working in pairs) and she never changes the pairs in a lesson, this can result in the students feeling the activities are repetitive and boring.*

Task 4 - Feedback

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



This work is published under the *Creative Commons 3.0 New Zealand Attribution Non-commercial Share Alike Licence (BY-NC-SA)*. Under this licence you are free to copy, distribute, display and perform the work as well as to remix, tweak, and build upon this work noncommercially, as long as you credit the author/s and license your new creations under the identical terms.

Do you often avoid drilling new language items with your students? Is this because you don't think it's useful or is it because you are not sure how to go about it? This lesson aims to get you thinking about the role of drilling in language-focused lessons and demonstrate how to go about it.

Task 1 – To drill, or not to drill?

Two teachers are discussing drilling in the staffroom.

Mona: Then after I've done feedback on the matching tasks, I thought I'd drill the words.

Louise: Really?

Mona: Yeah – why not?

Louise: I never drill language – it's so old-fashioned.

Mona: Do you think so? I was taught to drill on my training course and that was only last year.

Louise: I've been teaching for just over ten years now and I've never drilled anything.

Mona: Interesting. What do your students say?

Louise: Nothing.

Mona: Mine never complain when I drill them.



Whose opinion do you agree with? Jot down your ideas / suggestions on a note pad, then check the answer key below. 🗝️

Task 1 Feedback

Drilling is a teaching skill that can sometimes be considered controversial. Teachers who don't like it see it as a relic of the audio-lingual approach to language teaching. Other teachers think that drilling is useful because that is how they like to learn a language. There is another group of teachers who avoid drilling because they are not sure of how to drill. This lesson will work through some of those issues associated with the skill and describe different drilling procedures.

Key Skill

What is drilling? In its most basic form drilling involves teachers asking students to repeat individual words or utterances. The teacher gives a model of the language and the students repeat it either in unison or individually or both.

Task 2 – What are some of the issues?



Below are some opinions about drilling. Sort them into two groups, opinions 'for' drilling and those 'against'.

NB. Two of the opinions are probably NOT true. Can you decide which two they are?

1. Many students expect their teachers to drill new language.
2. Part of language learning is a physical skill. Drilling is like sending students' speech organs to the gym.
3. Drilling doesn't involve real communication.
4. Drilling helps students to memorise new language.
5. Drilling can help students with pronunciation. It allows them to feel new sounds.
6. Drilling means that the teacher imposes new language on students and is unnatural.
7. Even if teachers don't drill, students will often quietly drill themselves because they want to have a go at saying new language items.
8. Drilling won't necessarily lead to internalisation and acquisition of new language.
9. Drilling helps students to understand new language.

for	against

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Key Skill

Drilling probably does not aid the acquisition or learning of new language items, but it can help students with the pronunciation of language. It may not be a natural and highly communicative classroom activity, but students seem to want to be drilled nonetheless. It helps if students understand the language that teachers drill. In other words, the meaning should be clarified first otherwise drilling simply involves mindless repetition.

Task 3 – Ways of drilling



Match the five ways of drilling 1 to 5 with the definitions a to e and the examples i to v.

Ways of drilling	Definitions	Examples
1. choral		
2. individual		
3. open pair		
4. substitution		
5. transformation		

Definitions

- a. Students repeat an utterance. The teacher says or holds up a new word or phrase. Students repeat the first utterance, but replace a word or phrase from that utterance with the new word or phrase.
- b. The teacher drills one student in a question and a second student in an answer to that question. The two students then repeat their question and answer exchange with the rest of the class listening.
- c. The teacher says a word or an utterance and the whole class repeats that word or utterance together in unison.
- d. The teacher says an utterance and the students say something similar to the teacher's utterance, but, in doing so, they change a key structure.
- e. The teacher says a word or utterance and then nominates a student to say that word or utterance.

Examples

- i. Teacher: 'He's just gone home'. - Jin Yong.
Student: He's just got home.
- ii. Teacher: 'He's just gone home'
Students: He'd just gone home.
- iii. Teacher: 'Where's he gone?' - Yang.
Student: Where's he gone?
Teacher: 'He's just gone home.' - Sven.
Student: He's just gone home.
Teacher: OK again. Question – Yang. Answer – Sven.
- iv. Teacher: 'He's just gone home.' - Everyone.
Students: He's just gone home.
- v. Students: He's just gone home.
Teacher: 'the bank.'
Students: He's just gone to the bank.


Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Key Skill

Drilling does not have to always be repetitive and uncreative. Substitution and transformation drills can provide students with a small degree of creativity and cognitive effort.

Task 4 – Five steps to drilling



Numbers 1 to 8 below are eight steps in the process of drilling a new word or utterance. Put these steps in the correct order. Letters a to h give a rationale for each step. Once you have ordered the steps, match a rationale to each step. 

Eight steps of drilling	Rationale
1. Once students give you the word or utterance, provide your own oral model at a natural speed ...	
2. Students repeat the language together as a group ...	
3. Having broken down the oral model of the language, repeat it again at a more natural speed	
4. If the word or utterance you want to drill is on the white board, start by wiping it off ...	
5. Re-elicite the language you want to drill using the prompts ...	
6. Nominate individual students and get them to repeat the word or utterance ...	
7. Show students a prompt – a picture or some key words that relate to the language you want to drill ...	
8. Highlight any key pronunciation features of the new language – demonstrate these orally rather than using the white board ...	

Rationale for each step

- a. ... so that students have some visual representation of the language you want to drill.
- b. ... so that you can check the pronunciation of the new language by individual students.
- c. ... so that the first oral model that students hear is a natural one.
- d. ... so that students have to think a little bit about the language they are going to repeat.
- e. ... so that students focus on pronunciation features such as stress, weak forms and linking.
- f. ... so that all students have the opportunity to say the new language without being heard by the rest of the class.
- g. ... so that students don't just read the new language aloud and they have to listen carefully in order to repeat.
- h. ... so that students will repeat the language with a more natural rhythm.

Thinking about your teaching ...

Find a colleague who speaks a second language that you don't know at all. Ask your colleague to give you two or three mini-lessons in that language and specifically ask that person to drill you in the new language. After the lesson write down your reactions to being drilled and think about why you had those reactions.

Note your reactions and thoughts in your *Teaching log*.

Taking it to the classroom ...

If you don't normally drill your students, try doing it over a period of about four or five lessons. If you normally drill, try not doing it over the same period of time. After that, give your students a questionnaire about drilling – did they like it or did they miss it? Why?

Want to find out more ... ?

On pages 255 - 260 of *Learning Teaching (2nd edition)* by Jim Scrivener (Macmillan 2005), there is further reading on drilling.

For some practical ideas on drilling options see pages 206-7 of *The Practice of English Language Teaching (4th edition)* by Jeremy Harmer (Pearson 2007).

Related TaskBook lessons...

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

- **Unit 2 g) Correcting spoken errors:** deals with error correction of students' spoken errors in the classroom.

Answer Key



Task 2 – Feedback

for	against
<p><i>1. Many students expect their teachers to drill new language.</i></p> <p><i>2. Part of language learning is a physical skill. Drilling is like sending students' speech organs to the gym.</i></p> <p><i>5. Drilling can help students with pronunciation. It allows them to feel new sounds.</i></p> <p><i>7. Even if teachers don't drill, students will often quietly drill themselves because they want to have a go at saying new language items.</i></p>	<p><i>3. Drilling doesn't involve real communication.</i></p> <p><i>6. Drilling means that the teacher imposes new language on students and is unnatural.</i></p> <p><i>8. Drilling won't necessarily lead to internalisation and acquisition of new language.</i></p>

Probably not true: 4. Drilling helps students to memorise new language.

Probably not true: 9. Drilling helps students to understand new language.

Task 3 – Feedback

- 1. choral c and iv
- 2. individual e and i
- 3. open pair b and iii
- 4. substitution a and v
- 5. transformation d and ii

Task 4 – Feedback

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



This work is published under the *Creative Commons 3.0 New Zealand Attribution Non-commercial Share Alike Licence* (BY-NC-SA). Under this licence you are free to copy, distribute, display and perform the work as well as to remix, tweak, and build upon this work noncommercially, as long as you credit the author/s and license your new creations under the identical terms.

Do you feel that you always do feedback on classroom activities in the same way? This lesson will help you to gain an understanding of different types of feedback and suggest ways that you can vary your approach.

Task 1 – Emily’s observation

The Director of Studies (DoS) at Emily’s school observed her teach a lesson a couple of days ago. In the DoS’s written feedback, she made the comment: “you are sometimes unclear during feedback stages”. Emily isn’t quite sure what the DoS means and she hasn’t had a chance to have a tutorial with her as yet.



What do you think the DoS means? Jot down your answers on a note pad, then check the answer key below. 🗝️

Task 1 Feedback 🗝️

Sometimes teachers want students to think carefully about their answers and initially neither confirm nor deny whether the answer is correct. However, this can sometimes go on for too long and get frustrating for students. At the end of feedback, students can sometimes be unsure about whether their answers to a task were correct or not.

Key Skill

Doing feedback on a task involves more than giving the right or wrong answers. First, you need to think about whether you are doing *language-focused* feedback or *content-focused* feedback. In content-focused feedback, teachers are responding to ideas and information. However, in language-focused feedback teachers are responding to the language that students produce.

Task 2 – Different types of feedback



Numbers 1 to 8 describe different kinds of classroom activities. Put these activities in the correct box in the table, thinking about whether the feedback is language- or content-based, and whether or not there is a right answer. Two of the activities can be placed in more than one box.

Type of feedback	There is a right answer	There is no right answer
Content-based		
Language-based		

Classroom activities

1. Reading comprehension task.
2. Matching new vocabulary to definitions.
3. Role play that is freer oral practice of a grammar point.
4. Completing a text that has missing words.
5. Listening comprehension task.
6. Problem-solving information gap activity.
7. Discussion that is a lead-in to a reading text.
8. Written grammar task where students choose the correct tense.

Check your ideas in the answer key. 🗝️

Key Skill

When you give feedback on both content and language, it is usually more motivating and interesting for students if you deal with content first. This shows that you are responding to their ideas and not just focusing on how they said something.

Task 3 – Some example feedback procedures



Letters a to l describe different steps in two feedback procedures. One is feedback on a *discussion* that students have been having; the other is on a *grammar activity* where students had to choose a correct tense.

- a) Decide which steps belong to the speaking activity and which belong to the grammar activity.
- b) Put the steps in the correct order for each activity.

Discussion	Grammar activity
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.
6.	6.

Steps

- a. Nominate students randomly and put all suggested answers on the white board.
- b. Praise students' contributions and ideas.
- c. Encourage other students to ask questions about or comment on what each group says.
- d. Confirm which answers are correct.
- e. Ask students to check their answers in pairs.
- f. Ask some follow up questions and make comments on what students have said yourself.
- g. Get pairs to look at the unresolved answers quickly for a second time.
- h. If there is disagreement over the answers, accept both versions and write them on the white board.
- i. If you feel it is appropriate and useful, highlight a few errors you overheard in the discussion.
- j. Ask each group to decide what they will say in reporting their discussion.
- k. Elicit the outcome of the second pair discussion.
- l. Ask each group to tell the class what they have been talking about.

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Key Skill

You have to manage your student group carefully if you want to do feedback well. Nominating students, encouraging peer interaction and praising students are all key components of successful feedback.

Task 4 – Some good ideas



Numbers 1 to 6 are some good ideas for the management of feedback. Letters a to f are rationales for each idea. Match the rationales to the ideas.

It's a good idea to...	Because...
1. conduct feedback by nominating students randomly rather than in a sequence ...	
2. ask students to justify their answers, particularly with reading and listening comprehension tasks ...	
3. allow a certain amount of wait time when doing content-focused feedback ...	
4. be clear about what answer is correct and what answer is not ...	
5. provide a written model answer for some tasks on the white board or on an OHP ...	
6. occasionally avoid doing feedback at all ...	

Rationales

- a. ... it will avoid any frustration for students.
- b. ... it is not necessary if you can see that all students got all answers correct when you monitored – you can just confirm that everything is correct and move on.
- c. ... it keep students involved in feedback.
- d. ... as it allows weaker students something concrete to check their answers against.
- e. ... sometimes students need to organise their ideas before replying.
- f. ... it makes students think a little harder and offers stronger students more challenge.

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Thinking about your teaching ...

Make notes over a week's teaching. At the end of each lesson, think about what feedback you did and how you did it. Taking into consideration some of the points made in the tasks above, evaluate how effective you think your feedback was.

Note your conclusions in your *Teaching Log*

Taking it to the classroom ...

An alternative approach to feedback is to let learners know that you will only confirm the answers to 2 or 3 questions on a task. In groups they have to negotiate and decide which answers they feel certain they have got right and which they are most unsure of. This strategy makes them think harder and it also generates a lot of groups discussion as they negotiate.

Want to find out more ... ?

Pages 107 - 113 of *The Practice of English Language Teaching (4th edition)* by Jeremy Harmer (Pearson 2007) contains reading on the teacher role of 'organiser' and also discusses the role of feedback in lessons.

Related TaskBook lessons...

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

- **Unit 2 d) Pace in the classroom:** includes discussion of the idea that feedback can affect pace, either positively or negatively.

Answer Key



Task 2 – Feedback

Type of feedback	Right answer	No right answer
Content-based	1. Reading comprehension task. 5. Listening comprehension task.	3. Role play that is freer oral practice of a grammar point. 6. Problem-solving information gap activity. 7. Discussion that is a lead in to a reading text.
Language-based	2. Matching new vocabulary to definitions. 4. Completing a text that has missing words. 8. Written grammar task where students choose the correct tense.	3. Role play that is freer oral practice of a grammar point.* 6. Problem-solving information gap activity.*

* This kind of feedback would involve error correction. The answer is not 'right' or 'wrong' as such as there was no expected answer and the teacher feeds back on what they have heard.

Task 3 – Feedback

Speaking Activity

- 1) j
- 2) l
- 3) c
- 4) f
- 5) b
- 6) i

Grammar Activity

- 1) e
- 2) a
- 3) h
- 4) g
- 5) k
- 6) d

Task 4 – Feedback

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




This work is published under the *Creative Commons 3.0 New Zealand Attribution Non-commercial Share Alike Licence* (BY-NC-SA). Under this licence you are free to copy, distribute, display and perform the work as well as to remix, tweak, and build upon this work noncommercially, as long as you credit the author/s and license your new creations under the identical terms.

Are you sometimes unsure about when you should correct your students' spoken language? Do you feel that you always correct them in the same way? This lesson looks at the types of errors students make with oral language and it outlines a procedure and some techniques for dealing with these.


Task 1 – Was that an error or a slip of the tongue?

Andy: "I corrected this student of mine in class the other day. She left out an article, so I interrupted her and told her she needed to add 'the'. She got quite annoyed with me and told me that she knew all about articles. However, in the next breath she was telling me she wants to be corrected more."



Who has the problem – Andy or his student? Why do you think this? Jot down your answers on a note pad, then check the answer key below. 

Task 1 Feedback

The student does seem  be sending slightly contradictory messages to Andy. However, Andy's intervention may have been untimely and interrupted the student's flow of conversation. The key issue here is that knowing when to correct is a sensitive judgment call for teachers. Students do want feedback on their language, but they like to get it at the right time.

Key Skill

An important distinction to make is the one between systematic errors and mistakes or slips. Systematic errors are indicative of a student's lack of language knowledge, while small mistakes or slips occur in language that students know, but lack of concentration or tiredness can mean they make a mistake.

Task 2 – Types of errors



Numbers 1 to 5 are examples of spoken errors. Letters a to e are categories of errors. Number i to v indicate what the problem is. Match the examples to the categories and problems.

Example	Category	Problem
1. "I will to the party go."		
2. "My sister is higher than my brother."		
3. "I went to a barty and danced all night."		
4. A: "Do you like wine?" B: "No thank you."		
5. Customer in a café: "Give me a coffee."		

Categories

- a. pronunciation
- b. pragmatic (language in context)
- c. grammar
- d. vocabulary
- e. discourse

Problems

- i. collocation
- ii. cohesion
- iii. register too informal
- iv. sound (phoneme)
- v. word order

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Key Skill

The causes of error stem from the students' lack of knowledge. This can be a result of having learnt rules incorrectly or oversimplifying a rule they have learnt. A student's first language can play a role in the cause of error, particularly with pronunciation errors. Some errors are the result of a student being creative with the limited English they do have in order to communicate.

Task 3 – A procedure for correcting errors



Letters a to j below outline ten steps in a procedure for correcting students errors. Place the steps in the correct order.

Steps	Order? [1-10]
a. If that's not successful, other students can be asked to correct the language.	
b. Alternatively, the teacher may wait until the activity is finished then correct errors.	
c. Another approach is to record students as they carry out a speaking activity and get them to correct themselves when they listen to the recording.	
d. The first decision the teacher has to make is whether to correct the error, or just let it go by.	
e. If no-one can help, then the teacher should give the correct version of the language.	
f. The teacher hears the error and categorizes it in their head.	
g. However, the teacher may decide to correct the language after the speaking activity by noting down errors and then writing them up on the white board for the students to correct.	
h. Either way, the error (or errors) needs to be pointed out to students.	
i. If the teacher decides to, on-the-spot error correction could be done, to deal with the error immediately.	
j. When the teacher does on-the-spot correction, the student who made the error needs to have the opportunity to self correct, first of all.	

Check your ideas in the answer key.

Key Skill

Teachers are more likely to do on-the-spot error correction during accuracy-focused activities such as clarifying new language and controlled oral practice of new language. Delayed feedback on errors is more likely to take place after freer practice or spoken fluency activities.

Task 4 – Correction techniques



Letters a to f below describe different correction techniques. Put them in order from 1 *least directive* (i.e. the teacher does little to point out that an error has been made and does not indicate where and what the problem is) to 6 *most directive* (i.e. the teacher very clearly indicates the place and nature of the error).

The student error is: *'I have gone to the movies yesterday.'*

Correction technique	How directive? [1 – 6]
a. The teacher repeats the student's error with a rising intonation and perhaps a quizzical facial expression.	
b. The teacher says: <i>It was yesterday – exact time – what's correct?</i>	
c. The teacher says: <i>So do we use present perfect or past simple?</i>	
d. The teacher says: <i>Think about the grammar – the verb.</i>	
e. The teacher spells out the utterance on their fingers, highlights the fingers that represent 'have gone' and says the word 'tense'.	
f. The teacher recasts the student's utterance without expression: <i>Oh so you went to the movies yesterday.</i>	

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Thinking about your teaching ...

Student errors are an interesting insight into learners' interlanguage (the current state of a learner's language). This keeps changing and developing as their level of ability increases. It can be interesting to do a detailed study of one learner's interlanguage. Collect as many samples as you can from the learner by listening carefully to them in class and perhaps by asking permission to record them speaking. You might be able to add written errors to your collection. What do these errors tell you about this learner? What do they tell you about learners at this level? (i.e. are some of the errors familiar?)

Note your conclusions in your *Teaching Log*.

Taking it to the classroom ...

The best way of finding out if you are correcting enough is by asking your students. You can do this directly or you can give them a simple survey. It might be interesting to explore the idea of a 'correction contract'. You and the students formally agree when you should correct and what kinds of errors you correct.

Want to find out more ... ?

Pages 137 to 138 of *The Practice of English Language Teaching (4th edition)* by Jeremy Harmer (Pearson 2007) has an introduction to why learners make errors and mistakes.

Pages 288 to 292 of *Teaching and Learning in the Language Classroom* by Tricia Hedge (Oxford University Press 2000) contains extra reading on errors and error correction.

Pages 298 to 302 of *Learning Teaching (2nd edition)* by Jim Scrivener (Macmillan 2005) contains extra reading on different kinds of errors and discussion of on-the-spot correction techniques.

Related TaskBook lessons...

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

- Unit 2 h) Correcting written language: *a useful follow-up to this lesson, dealing with error correction of students' writing.*
- Unit 2 f) Conducting feedback on classroom activities: *discusses a different ways to approach feedback after tasks and activities.*

Answer Key



Task 2 – Feedback

- 1) c, v
- 2) d, i
- 3) a, iv
- 4) e, ii
- 5) b, iii

Task 3 – Feedback

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

Task 4 – Feedback

1. **f.** *Comment: The teacher does almost nothing to indicate that an error has been made.*

2. **a.** *Comment: The teacher indicates that there is something wrong with the utterance, but does not say what the problems is.*

3. **d.** *Comment: The teacher is slightly more specific and indicates that the problem is grammar and not vocabulary or pronunciation.*

4. **b.** *Comment: The teacher clearly indicates that time reference is the problem and therefore the verb form needs correcting.*

5. **e.** *Comment: The teacher clearly points out where the error is and explicitly states that there is a problem with the verb form.*

6. **c.** *Comment: The teacher is specific about the fact the verb form is incorrect and tells the student how to correct it. This approach assumes that the student knows grammar terminology.*



This work is published under the *Creative Commons 3.0 New Zealand Attribution Non-commercial Share Alike Licence (BY-NC-SA)*. Under this licence you are free to copy, distribute, display and perform the work as well as to remix, tweak, and build upon this work noncommercially, as long as you credit the author/s and license your new creations under the identical terms.

Are you sometimes unsure about how to correct your students' written work? Should you just write in the correct version or maybe just underline errors? This lesson looks at the areas you can give feedback on and looks at some different ways of providing feedback on students' written work.

Task 1 – A complaint about Andy

Andy's Director of Studies pulled him aside and informed him that a lot of the students in his academic writing class had made a complaint. They said that Andy never gave feedback on their written work. Andy protested and said that he did. He indicated that he responded to the ideas and in doing so reformulated many of the language errors in a correct version. He thought the students and the Director of Studies were being unfair.



Is Andy's opinion justified? What do you think and why? Jot down your answers on a note pad, then check the answer key below. 🗝️



Task 1 Feedback

Andy has some justification in his opinion. However, this kind of feedback might have been too subtle for some of his learners. He may not have pointed out to them that this is his way of providing feedback on writing and he could have indicated that his reformulations contained useful suggestions on correct language. If the students don't know to look for this, they are unlikely to see it.

Key Skill

There are many different ways of providing feedback on students' written work. The key issue is that students need feedback not only on their language but also on the ideas they include in their written work.

Task 2 – A procedure



Letters a to e outline steps in a typical procedure for the correction and rewriting of students’ written work. Put these steps in a logical order.

Steps	Order? [1- 5]
a. In pairs or small groups students help each other to make sense of the corrections that the teacher has pointed out in their written work.	
b. Students write the next draft of their text incorporating the feedback.	
c. Students finish a draft of their text and exchange them to get feedback from their peers.	
d. The teacher collects in the students’ texts and indicates where there are problems.	
e. The teacher monitors and helps the pairs and groups, clarifying anything that is unclear in the marking.	

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Key Skill

The procedure above is not the only approach. For example, students could take the marked texts home to work on and the teacher could set up one-to-one tutorials with students. Another variation is the extent of the teacher’s marking. How explicit are you about errors? The next task looks at different approaches.

Task 3 – Different approaches



Numbers 1 to 6 in the grid are different approaches to providing feedback on students' written work. Letters a to f are strengths, while numbers i to vi are weaknesses that can be associated with the different approaches. Match the strengths and weaknesses to each approach.

Approaches to feedback on written work	Strengths	Weaknesses
1. The teacher corrects all mistakes and provides the correct version.		
2. The teacher underlines mistakes and uses a code to indicate the nature of the error.		
3. The teacher underlines errors, but gives no indication of the nature of the error.		
4. The teacher writes suggestions for improvement in the margin.		
5. The teacher takes 2 example texts and reformulates the language in these texts. The reformulations are distributed to the class as a whole to consider.		
6. Students give peer correction without any feedback from the teacher.		

Strengths

- a. This approach can combine feedback on language and content.
- b. This approach presents students with some challenge, but offers them some degree of support.
- c. This approach can provide students with useful models of language.
- d. This approach is very comprehensive in its feedback on language.
- e. This approach is very good at encouraging students to use each other as a resource.
- f. This approach provides students with a good sense of challenge.

Weaknesses

- i. This approach can be confusing for students as they are not sure what the problem is.
- ii. Students can feel that this approach lacks any real certainty for them.
- iii. This approach can result in too much feedback and can become demotivating for students.
- iv. In this approach the feedback on language can be too vague for many learners.
- v. Strict adherence to this approach won't provide learners with feedback on the content of their texts.
- vi. Learners may find this approach too general and not relate the feedback to their own work.

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Key Skill

It is a good idea to vary your approach to giving feedback. In doing so, you may be able to develop student independence and encourage them to think about accuracy and self-correct as much as possible.

Task 4 – Language Errors



Letters a to j are example errors. Numbers 1 to 10 below show typical symbols used to point out language errors (commonly used in the second approach described in task 3). Match the symbols to the errors.

Errors	Symbols
a. Say goodbye, he left for the airport.	
b. I am losing always my glasses.	
c. They went the library after lunch.	
d. I was very surprising to see him there.	
e. He got lost in a Amazon jungle.	
f. However it cannot be considered a perfect example.	
g. He is the highest person in his family.	
h. We have received your last message.	
i. I have been to Fiji last year.	
j. Sam has just finished recently.	

ESOL Teaching Skills TaskBook

Correcting written language: Unit 2 h)

Symbols

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. WF = wrong form | 6. WO = wrong word order |
| 2. WW = wrong word | 7. P = wrong punctuation |
| 3. T = wrong tense | 8. V = wrong verb form |
| 4. ^ = something is missing | 9. A = wrong article |
| 5. Sp = wrong spelling | 10. ø = extra word, not necessary |

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Thinking about your teaching ...

It would be interesting to trial two different approaches to giving feedback on students' written language that you have never used before. For example, where you typically give feedback by means of symbols, you could spend a month experimenting with reformulation and peer correction. (It is probably not a good idea to do this with a group that has to sit an exam.) At the end of the trial period, you could see whether there is any significant improvement in your students' written language. You can also ask them to give you feedback on the two approaches.

Note your conclusions in your *Teaching Log*.

Taking it to the classroom ...

Often students will make similar errors. You can build up a collection of common errors by having an "Error Box" in the class room. When learners make an error, it can be written on a card and placed in the "Error Box". The error cards can be used as the basis of a revision activity when doing writing activities.

Want to find out more ... ?

Pages 313 to 316 of *Teaching and Learning in the Language Classroom* by Tricia Hedge (Oxford University Press 2000), and pages 147 to 152 of *The Practice of English Language Teaching (4th edition)* by Jeremy Harmer (Pearson 2007), contain extra reading on giving feedback on students' written work.

Related TaskBook lessons...

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

- Unit 2 g) **Correcting spoken errors:** recommended as a precursor to this lesson, dealing with error correction of students' spoken errors in the classroom.

Answer Key



Task 2 – Feedback

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

Task 3 – Feedback

- 1) d, iii
- 2) b, v
- 3) f, i
- 4) a, iv
- 5) c, vi
- 6) e, ii

Task 4 – Feedback

1. WF = wrong form
*d. I was very **surprising** to see him there.*
2. WW = wrong word
*g. He is the **highest** person in his family.*
3. T = wrong tense
*i. I **have been** to Fiji last year.*
4. ^ = something is missing
c. They went ^ the library after lunch.
5. Sp = wrong spelling
*h. We have **received** your last message.*
6. WO = a problem with the word order
*b. I am losing **always** my glasses.*
7. P = wrong punctuation
f. However, it cannot be considered a perfect example.
8. V = wrong verb form
*a. **Say** goodbye, he left for the airport.*
9. A = wrong article
*e. He got lost in **a** Amazon jungle.*
10. ø = extra word, not necessary
*j. Sam has just finished **recently**.*



This work is published under the *Creative Commons 3.0 New Zealand Attribution Non-commercial Share Alike Licence* (BY-NC-SA). Under this licence you are free to copy, distribute, display and perform the work as well as to remix, tweak, and build upon this work noncommercially, as long as you credit the author/s and license your new creations under the identical terms.