What are the different listening sub-skills and how do we practise them in the classroom? This lesson will help you understand what different listening sub-skills students need to practise. It will also give you an understanding of how to order activities in a typical classroom lesson that aims to practise listening.

Task 1 – Is there another way?

Emily is explaining a problematic lesson to a colleague.
Emily: "Well, I was doing this listening lesson and I didn't want the lesson to be too hard for students. So I told them just to listen and try and understand what they could. But my students just complained and said they couldn't understand the words in the conversation, so they'd never have a hope of understanding the whole conversation. In the end I just gave up."

It is not surprising that Emily's lesson was problematic. What could she have done? Jot down your ideas / suggestions on a note pad, then check the answer key below.

Task 1 Feedback

Emily didn't think about which listening sub-skills to practise and how to order different listening activities in the lesson. This probably meant the students immediately focused on a lot of detail and tried to understand individual words rather than the main ideas in the conversation. There are more efficient and supportive ways of conducting listening lessons. Read on.

Key skill

When people listen in their first language, they use a variety of strategies to get both the main idea and the detail of what they listen to. By staging well planned listening lessons in the classroom, we can help students to understand spoken text more effectively.

Task 2 – Listening and processing models

When learners listen to a stream of sound, they use both 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' processing. Match the processing models to the correct definition. Two of the definitions are not correct:

Processing models	Definition
1. 'top-down' processing	
2. 'bottom-up' processing	

Definitions

a. Listeners only listen to parts of a conversation and take small 'rests' from the stream of sound.

b. Listeners try to make sense of the stream of sound by trying to understand words or grammatical structures they are familiar with.

c. Listeners process what they hear in relation to their background knowledge of the topic or the situation.

d. Listeners try to make sense of the stream of sound by following the logical order of what they hear.

Check your ideas in the answer key.

Key skill

The way we process incoming language can affect the way we understand information. In our first language we use *both* processing models and sometimes in tandem. We do this automatically in response to the kind of text we are listening to.

> ## Task 3 – Listening strategies and processing models

Letters a to g describe different listening strategies which are associated with either top-down or bottom-up processing. Match the strategies to the correct processing model.

Top-down processing	Bottom-up processing

Listening strategies

a. Listening carefully to football results.

b. Listening to flight departure announcements in order to hear the departure gate.

c. Predicting the content of a lecture or short talk on a subject that the listener knows something about.

d. Listening attentively to try and understand (or infer) a speaker's attitude to something because the speaker has not stated their opinion clearly.

e. Listening to get the general idea of the topic of a conversation.

f. Listening to a series of short conversations in order to understand where the conversation is taking place.

g. Listening in order to do a dictation activity.

Check your ideas in the answer key. 🔑

Key skill

• When we use **top-down processing**, we tend to use "bigger picture" information such as the context, the gist of the message, the tone of speakers' voices to make sense of what we are hearing.

• When we use **bottom-up processing**, we listen for the individual "blocks"

Task 4 – A typical listening lesson

Numbers 1 to 5 show a typical order for different steps in a listening lesson. Imagine your students are listening to a conversation between a tourist and someone who lives in your town – the local. The tourist is asking the local for directions. Letters a to e are the different activities for this lesson. Match the activities to the steps.

Steps in a listening lesson	Activities
1. Pre-listening activity to activate students' knowledge on the topic of the text.	
2. Listening for a general understanding (listening for gist).	
3. Listening for a more detailed understanding of information in the text.	
4. Very detailed listening for language (vocabulary, grammar, phonology) in the text.	
5. Follow-on speaking activity.	

Activities

a. Students listen and mark the route the local suggests on the map.

b. Students listen to find out where the tourist wants to go and why they want to go there.

c. Students evaluate whether the route suggested by the local is the best one.

d. Students look at a map of the city and find different landmarks.

e. The teacher dictates two sentences from the local's directions.

Additional question:
- In steps 2 and 3, should the teacher give students the task *before* or *after* they listen? Why do you think this?

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

⮑ Thinking about your teaching …

When we listen to things in our daily life, we listen in different ways and we usually have different reasons for listening. Think of a typical day (yesterday? last weekend?) and make a note of all the things you listened to. Try to analyse *why* you listened to these things and *how* you listened. What relevance does this have to getting your students to listen in the classroom?

Note your conclusions in your *Teaching Log*.

⮑ Taking it to the classroom …

In general, students understand more of a listening text each time they listen to it. It might pay to point this out to them, or you could elicit this idea from them and ask them if they understood more or less the third time they listened to the text. It also helps if you play the tape more than once, particularly during activities that require students to listen in detail.

⮑ Want to find out more … ?

On pages 178 to 183 of *Learning Teaching (2nd edition)* by Jim Scrivener (Macmillan 2005), there is further reading on developing listening skills, and ideas for staging listening lessons.

On pages 270 to 274 of *The Practice of English Language Teaching (4th edition)* by Jeremy Harmer (Pearson 2007), there is further reading on top-down and bottom-up processing, and how these relate to the structure of receptive skills lessons (both listening and reading).

See also section 7 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 TaskBook series, which also relate to this topic:

• **Unit 3 b) Listening 2:** Learner-friendly listening lessons (*a follow up to this lesson*)
• **Unit 3 c) Reading 1:** Knowing about strategies and sub-skills (*a useful focus on another receptive skill, highlighting the stages of a reading lesson*)

Answer Key

Task 2 – Feedback

1) c
2) b

Task 3 - Feedback

Top-down = c, e, f
Bottom-up = a, b, d, g

Task 4 - Feedback

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

Additional question:
The teacher should give the task <u>before</u> students listen, as this gives them a reason for listening. If the task is not given first, students may be unsure about what they need to listen for and begin to focus on irrelevant words or ideas.

Do your listening lessons sometimes go badly? Do your students often look anxious when you say that you are going to do listening practice in a lesson? This lesson will help you understand why this is sometimes the case and will give you strategies for making listening lessons more manageable for your students. Before you complete this task, it may be helpful to have looked at *Listening 1: Listening sub-skills and a typical lesson.*

Task 1 – Frank's disastrous lesson

Frank's listening lesson went really badly. Most of the things he did or didn't do in the lesson did not help the students. Look at all the things he did. Only <u>one</u> of these actions was a good idea. Put X next to the good idea. Then check your ideas in the answer key below. 🔑

The things Frank did/didn't do

1. He didn't cue the tape before the lesson and it took him some time to find the right text on the tape.

2. He didn't bother giving the students a gist task.

3. He wrote on the white board with a squeaky pen during the gist listening.

4. He handed out the detailed listening task after the tape had started.

5. He got students to check their answers in pairs before doing feedback.

6. He didn't bother doing feedback on all the questions in the detailed task.

🔑

Task 1 Feedback
Action 5 was the only really good idea in Frank's lesson.

Key Skill
For many students, listening is the most challenging of the four skills. Often listening lessons are like tests for them and teachers need to find ways of making these lessons more manageable and less threatening.

Task 2 – Advice for Frank

What advice can you give to Frank to help him improve his lesson? Write some advice for each problem 1 – 5 below. Begin with the phrase "Make sure" and give him a reason beginning with "because". Look at the example to help you.

Problem	Make sure...	Because...
1. The tape wasn't cued at the right place and it took him some time to find the right text on the tape.	**eg** ... you cue the tape before you go in the classroom	**eg** ... trying to find the correct place on a tape in class can wastes a lot of time and looks unprofessional.
2. He didn't bother giving the students a gist task.		
3. He wrote on the white board with a squeaky pen during the gist listening.		
4. He handed out the detailed listening task after the tape had started.		
5. He didn't bother doing feedback on all the questions in the detailed task.		

Check your ideas in the answer key. 🔑

Key Skill

Listening lessons need to be thoroughly prepared and planned. This means thinking of suitable tasks and preparing all materials associated with the listening in advance. During the lesson, tasks should be set before playing the tape and teachers should maintain as low a profile as possible.

Task 3 – What makes listening difficult?

Listening in the classroom is harder than reading. Numbers 1 to 6 show different reasons why this is so. Sort them into two categories, according to whether the problem is related to the listening process itself or to the nature of listening texts.

The process of listening	Nature of listening texts

Reasons why listening in the classroom is harder than reading

1. Students have no control over the speed of the text.

2. Speakers in listening texts often have different accents that may not be familiar to students.

3. Students have no time to pause and think about the content of the text.

4. There is often background noise in the recordings that is a distraction from the voices of the speakers.

5. Sometimes the speakers in a dialogue speak very quickly.

6. Listening happens in real time.

Check your ideas in the answer key.

Key Skill

Challenges associated with listening are largely beyond your students' control. However, it is possible to make sure that the nature of listening texts are manageable for the level you are teaching, particularly lower levels. The next task gets you to think of some ideas for how to achieve this.

Task 4 – Creating listening texts

When you create and use your own listening texts, there are things to consider that can make the process of listening and the nature of listening tasks more manageable. Think of a good idea for each consideration. Look at the example to help you.

Consideration	Good Idea
1. Number of speakers	eg. Don't include too many speakers in a taped conversation, as it can be difficult to work out who is who.
2. Gender of speakers	
3. Kinds of tasks	
4. Speed of delivery	
5. Pausing the tape	

Check your ideas in the answer key.

⮑ Thinking about your teaching …

Keep a note of listening lessons that you give with one particular group of students over an extended period of a month of more. Note down the topic of the text, the number and type of speakers, the length of text and then rate it in terms of level of difficulty. (You can create your own scale of difficulty.) The aim of doing this is to try and establish whether there are any trends that you can note in terms of what challenges your learners.

Note your conclusions in your *Teaching Log*.

⮑ Taking it to the classroom …

Look back at the ideas suggested in task 4. Have you tried all of these strategies at some time in your teaching experience? If not, try them out over a period of time. If you feel that there are problems with a listening text that will be too difficult for your students (e.g. speed of delivery), you can try re-recording it using your colleagues.

⮑ Want to find out more … ?

On pages 187 and 188 of *The Practice of English Language Teaching (4th edition)* by Jeremy Harmer (Pearson 2007), there is a useful discussion on alternative sources of listening materials and formats for students and teachers.

On pages 181 - 184 of *Learning Teaching (2nd edition)* by Jim Scrivener (Macmillan 2005), there are ideas for some alternative approaches to listening 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 a) Listening 1:** Listening sub-skills and a typical lesson (*recommended as a precursor to this lesson*)
• **Unit 3 d) Reading 2:** Setting tasks for reading texts (*a useful focus on another receptive skill, highlighting the need for learner-friendly tasks to accompany reading texts*)

Answer Key

Task 2 – Feedback

2. Make sure you give students a simple gist listening task because it gives them a reasons to listen and if it is easy, it gives them confidence.

3. Make sure you don't do anything to distract your students when the tape is playing because they need to concentrate as much as possible.

4. Make sure you hand out the task before you play the tape because students need time to read the task before they listen to the text. The task will also help them understand 'how' to listen.

5. Make sure you do feedback on all questions in the task because students often feel unsure if they have really understood and like confirmation of their understanding.

Task 3 – Feedback

Process of Listening = **1, 3, 6**
Nature of listening texts = **2, 4, 5**

Task 4 – Feedback

2. If you have 2 speakers, it is often easier if one is male and the other is female. For students, this makes it easier to distinguish between the 2 speakers.

3. Don't give tasks that are too challenging or turn the listening practice into a test. The aim of the task should be to give students a reason to listen.

4. Make sure the speakers of a recorded conversation speak at a natural speed, but don't let them speak too quickly, particularly for low level students.
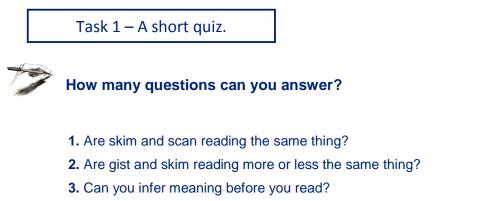
5. If the listening text is very long, it may help students if you pause the tape occasionally to give them a little bit of thinking time.

Which different reading skills should students practise and when should they practise them? This lesson will give you a clearer idea about how to find your way around reading skills.

Task 1 – A short quiz.

How many questions can you answer?

    1. Are skim and scan reading the same thing?

    2. Are gist and skim reading more or less the same thing?

    3. Can you infer meaning before you read?

    4. Do you typically scan a bus timetable?

    5. What kind of text do you typically read extensively?

Check your answers in the key below. 🔑

Task 1 Feedback 🔑

1. No	4. Yes
2. Yes	5. A novel
3. Not usually, no	

If you got 2 or more answer wrong, or you are uncertain about some of the terminology in this lesson, then this lesson will definitely help you!

Task 2 – Defining the sub-skills

Look at different reading sub-skills and strategies 1 - 7.
Match the definitions a – g below with the correct sub-skill.

Reading sub-skills and strategies	Definitions
1. prediction	
2. skim reading	
3. gist reading	
4. scan reading	
5. intensive reading	
6. inferring meaning	
7. extensive reading	

Definitions

a. Reading to get detailed information from the text.

b. Reading a text to locate a specific piece of information such as a word or a number or a time. It is not necessary to understand the whole text in order to do this.

c. Either guessing the meaning of new vocabulary in a text or understanding meaning or a message in the text that is not immediately obvious.

d. Reading to get a general but not detailed understanding of the text.

e. Also reading to get an overall but not detailed understanding of the text.

f. Reading longer texts frequently over a period of time. This is usually done independently and not in the classroom.

g. Looking at headlines, pictures, typeface and layout to guess what you think a text will be about.

Check your ideas in the answer key. 🔑

Key skill

When we read in our first language, we read in different ways. When students start reading in a second language they need to re-learn different ways of reading. Teachers need to know about these different reading skills so they can develop them in the classroom.

Task 3 – Which sub-skill for which text?

Read the description of the different texts and the motivations for reading (a – h) below. Decide which reading sub-skills and strategies (1 – 7) you would probably use to read each. Write the number of the sub-skill / strategy in the second column. You will need to use some of the skills more than once, and some texts may use more than one skill.

Texts and the motivations for reading	Sub-skills / Strategies
eg. A novel that you are really enjoying	*7*
a. A job advertisement for a job that you are really interested in.	
b. A couple of unknown words in a text that is included in an exam you are doing.	
c. A telephone directory.	
d. The editorial of a newspaper that you are not familiar with and whose political viewpoint you would like to understand.	
e. A series of articles, only some of which will be useful to you, for a report you're writing.	
f. Instructions for kitset furniture you are assembling (you are usually not very good at doing this!)	
g. A travel brochure when you are trying to decide on a holiday destination.	
h. An armchair travel book about a country you have enjoyed visiting.	
i. An online flight timetable.	

Reading sub-skills and strategies

1. Prediction.
2. Skim reading.
3. Gist reading.
4. Scan reading.
5. Intensive reading.
6. Inferring meaning (of vocabulary in context, or of the writer's point of view).
7. Extensive reading.

Check your ideas in the answer key.

Task 4 – Which task type for which skill?

Letters a – h show some typical reading tasks or instructions for reading texts in different ways. Match them with the reading sub-skills and strategies from the previous exercise (1-7) above.

Typical reading tasks or instructions	Reading sub-skills
a. Does John go overseas before or after finishing his degree?	
b. Talk about the headline and pictures and decide what you think the article will say.	
c. Does this article discuss a problem and offer a solution, or does it talk about 2 different points of view?	
d. Look at the words immediately before and after and see if they can help you guess the meaning.	
e. The government will change the law in the near future TRUE/FALSE	
f. Find the best times for leaving and returning.	
g. Do you think the writer of the letter supports the City Council or not? Why do you think so?	
h. Complete the following table by making notes on all the advantages and disadvantages of the proposal.	

Check your ideas in the answer key.

⮩ Thinking about your teaching …

It is useful to think about why you read different texts every day and how you read them. Over a defined period of time such as a week, keep a list of different texts you read and the way in which you read them.

Note your conclusions in your *Teaching Log*.

⮩ Taking it to the classroom …

Whenever you get students to read in the classroom, it is useful to ask yourself what reading skills you are practising and developing. Sometimes at the end of a reading lesson you can get students to reflect on the way they have read in class and suggest they use the same skills and strategies outside the classroom.

⮩ Want to find out more … ?

On pages 184 to 191 of *Learning Teaching (2nd edition)* by Jim Scrivener (Macmillan 2005), there is further reading on practising and developing reading skills with learners.

On pages 283 to 287 of *The Practice of English Language Teaching (4th edition)* by Jeremy Harmer (Pearson 2007), there is further reading on reading sub-skills and strategies.

See also section 8 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 3 d) Reading 2: Setting tasks for reading texts** (*a useful follow-up to this lesson, on creating tasks to help learners with reading texts*)
• **Unit 3 a) Listening 1**: **Listening sub-skills and a typical lesson** (*a lesson on another aspect of receptive skills*)

Answer Key

Task 2 – Feedback

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

Task 3 - Feedback

a. A job advertisement for a job that you are really interested in.
Detailed reading – your interest in the job means you will want to understand as much as possible.

b. A couple of unknown words in a text that is included in an exam you are doing.
Inferring meaning (guessing vocabulary in context) – it is unlikely that you will have a dictionary in an exam and it is important that you try and understand these words.

c. A telephone directory.
Scan reading – you will only want to locate the number or name that you are looking for.

d. The editorial of a newspaper that you are not familiar with and whose political viewpoint you would like to understand.
Inferring meaning (working out the message) – the political opinion of the editorial may not be immediately obvious.

e. A series of articles only some of which will be useful to you for a report you're writing.
Skim or gist reading – not all the articles will be useful to you, so you do not want to waste time reading them all in detail.

f. Instructions for kitset furniture you are assembling (you are usually not very good at doing this!)
Detailed reading – if you are not good at assembling kitsets, you will want to be sure you follow the instructions carefully.

g. A travel brochure when you are trying to decide on a holiday destination.
Both skim and scan – you are likely to scan for destination names, prices, dates etc. but you would also skim read descriptions of the destinations.

h. An armchair travel book about a country you have enjoyed visiting.
Extensive reading – you are likely to read this for pleasure as you would a novel.

i. An on-line flight timetable.
Scan reading – you will try and locate the dates and times that suit you best.

Task 4 - Feedback

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

What kind of tasks should be used with different reading texts, and what reading skills will they practise? This lesson will give you ideas on how to create more focused reading tasks. Before you complete this task, it may be helpful to have looked at *Reading 1: Knowing about strategies and sub-skills*.

Task 1 – What went wrong?

Chris gave his students a reading text about a lifesaver who rescued a young girl from the sea. He made sure students had a task to go with the text. After students finished reading, he asked them to do a role play – one person playing the lifesaver, the other person playing a journalist who interviews the lifesaver. When he asked students to do the role play, they told him they didn't feel confident and couldn't speak.

What went wrong?
Choose which of the following reasons is most likely to have made the students feel unconfident about doing the role play.

a. The students are shy about speaking.

b. Chris' instructions for the role play were unclear.

c. The students hadn't understood the text well enough to do the role play.

d. Chris didn't do a long enough lead in to the text.

e. The students can't imagine what it's like to be a lifesaver

Check your answers in the key below

Task 1 Feedback

All the answers are possible, but c is the most likely. Chris may have given his students a reading task, but it might not have checked the information in the text in enough detail and students do not feel they have understood the text well enough to do the role play.

Task 2 – Some opinions about reading

Read the following statements about reading and decide if you think these statements are True or False by writing 'T' or 'F' in the right hand column below.

Statements about reading	True or False?
a. It's a good idea to get students to underline new vocabulary in the text the very first time they read it.	
b. It is not possible to create an intensive reading task for a bus timetable.	
c. True / False questions can only be used for detailed reading tasks.	
d. You should set reading tasks before students begin reading.	
e. It's not a good idea to set time limits for reading because it makes students panic.	
f. The first time students read a text, it's better that they don't use a dictionary.	
g. Sometimes it's a good idea to get students reading and not bother about a task.	
h. Lead in activities are mostly a waste of time.	
i. It helps students to get the gist understanding of a text before reading for detail.	
j. Students should be able to understand a writer's opinion about a topic the very first time they read.	

Check your ideas in the answer key.

Task 3 – Matching tasks to texts

Numbers 1 to 3 show three different kinds of reading text. Letters a to i are descriptions of reading tasks. Match them together with the appropriate text, and then put them in the correct order (which task would you do first?, second?, etc).

Texts	Tasks
1. a job advertisement.	
2. a letter to the editor of a newspaper.	
3. an encyclopedia entry.	

Reading tasks

a. scanning for numbers like hours, wage etc.

b. very detailed reading to understand the writer's point of view

c. skim reading to locate relevant information

d. scan to locate the correct heading

e. detailed reading about the profile of the person they want and job description

f. skim reading to determine interest in topic under discussion

g. detailed reading to fully understand all the information related to this topic

h. skim reading for suitability

i. detailed reading to understand all points being made

Check your ideas in the answer key.

Key skill

When we ask students to read texts it is a good idea to give them a task with the text. Reading tasks should aim to do 2 things: make sure students practise a reading sub-skill and make sure students understand the text. Which skills students practice and how much detail they need to understand will depend on the kind of text students are reading and whether they are reading the text for the first, second or third time.

Task 4 – Evaluating reading tasks

In the box below is a short reading text followed by 3 reading tasks aimed at pre intermediate students. On the next page there are 3 statements (a to c) with two options (I and ii) that ask you to evaluate the reading tasks. Tick the option that you think is correct to complete each statement.

Popular TESOL Course

Our current TESOL Course has proved to be very popular with students from all around the world. We are running two groups this month and there is a very good mix of people from many different countries: China, the Czech Republic, Japan, Italy, Korea, Saudi Arabia, Switzerland and Tahiti.

Paola Cavalcante is the first Italian teacher to attend the TESOL Course since it began 8 years ago. She has taught English and French in her home town of Florence for a total of 12 years, but has focused almost exclusively on teaching English for the last 6 years.

She says there is great demand for English teachers in Italy. "Most people want to speak a foreign language for their jobs, for travelling, for study abroad and so on." The TESOL Course is the first methodology course that Paola has studied overseas. "At home when there was ever anything interesting about methodology I always liked to go – usually in the evening or weekends – in my free time."

> **_Task 1 (first reading)_**
> _What countries are talked about in the text?_
>
> **_Task 2 (second reading)_**
> _Which answer is correct? This text is …_
> _a) a report?   b) an article   c) a story_
>
> **_Task 3 (third reading)_**
> _What does the word "exclusively" mean?_ (see line 7)

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

a. Task 1 is …
   i.   appropriate for a first reading because it is easy for students to do.
   ii. not appropriate for a first reading because scanning the country names does not give a general idea of what the text is about.

b. Task 2 is …
   i.   appropriate for a second reading because it makes students think about the text type.
   ii. not appropriate for a second reading because it does not check understanding of the text in enough detail

c. Task 3 is …
   i.   appropriate for a third reading because by a third reading students should be able to work out the meaning of new words from the context.
   ii. not appropriate for a third reading because it is too hard

Check your ideas in the answer key. 🔑

➲ Thinking about your teaching …

Many course books do not provide appropriate reading tasks. They either require students to understand too much detail too soon, or they do not check understanding of texts in enough detail. Look at the course book or teaching materials you are currently using. Look at the reading texts and evaluate the tasks.

Note your conclusions in your *Teaching Log*.

➲ Taking it to the classroom …

Whenever you get students to read in the classroom, it is useful to ask yourself what reading skills you are practising and developing. Sometimes at the end of a reading lesson you can get students to reflect on the way they have read in class and suggest they use the same skills and strategies outside the classroom.

➲ Want to find out more … ?

On pages 205 to 212 of *Teaching and Learning in the Language Classroom* by Tricia Hedge (OUP 2000), there is further reading on teaching reading and task design.

On pages 184 to 191 of *Learning Teaching (2nd edition)* by Jim Scrivener (Macmillan 2005), there is further reading on teaching reading and task design, including a section on extensive reading.

On pages 283 to 302 of *The Practice of English Language Teaching (4th edition)* by Jeremy Harmer (Pearson 2007), there is further reading on teaching reading and task design, including a section on how to sequence a reading lesson.

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 3 a) Reading 1: Knowing about strategies and sub-skills** (*recommended as a precursor to this lesson*)

Answer Key 🔑

Task 2 feedback

a. False – *this means that students focus immediately on what they don't know, rather than focusing on what they do know.*

b. False – *it is only worth scanning a bus timetable for specific information. It is not necessary to read the whole timetable in detail.*

c. False – *True/ False questions could be used to check gist understanding of the text. It depends how you word the question.*

d. True – *this provides students with a reason to read.*

e. False – *sometimes it is necessary to set time limits for reading to make sure students practise skim or scan reading skills.*

f. True – *students need practice in reading as fluently as possible and stopping to use a dictionary every time they don't understand a word inhibits this process.*

g. False – *students need a reason for reading, particularly in the classroom where their motivation to read some texts may not be very high.*

h. False – *lead in activities can help raise a student's interest in reading a text and they can often provide useful background information on the content of a text.*

i. True - *a global understanding of the text will allow students to process the details more easily on the second reading.*

j. False – *to understand a writer's opinion more often than not requires a very detailed understanding of a text. This is too difficult to pick up in a first reading.*

Task 3 feedback

1) h, a and e
2) f, I and b
3) d, c and g

Task 4 feedback

a) Task 1 is …**ii**. … not appropriate for a first reading because scanning the country names does not give a general idea of what the text is about.
Task 1 should aim to provide a gist understanding of the text as a whole.

b) Task 2 is …**ii.** … not appropriate for a second reading because it does not check understanding of the text in enough detail
Task 2 should aim to give students a more thorough understanding of the information in the text.

c) Task 3 is …**i**. … appropriate for a third reading because by a third reading students should be able to work out the meaning of new words from the context.
But note: for task 3 to work, tasks 1 and 2 will need to be changed so they check information in the text more thoroughly.

Do you sometimes have trouble getting your students to speak? Are they sometimes reluctant just to have a go at speaking? This lesson will help you to understand how you can use different types of speaking activities to get your students talking. It will also give you an indication of a good way to set up these activities.

Task 1 – Jim's confusion

Jim: Sometimes I get students to do a role play because I want them to practise a particular grammar point. Other times I get them to do a role play because I want them to act out a situation they have just read about in a newspaper article. I know my overall aim is to get students to speak, but I'm sometimes not sure if I should also be doing some kind of grammar practice as well. The question is this: is it OK to do the kind of role play where students are just acting out a situation? And if it is OK, why is it OK?

What advice would you give Jim?
Jot down your advice on a note pad, then check the answer key below.🔑

Task 1 Feedback 🔑

Jim is right. The two kinds of role play are slightly different. In the first situation, the aim is to give students freer oral practice of a grammar point. However, in the second situation, there may not be a grammar practice aim at all. However, it is useful for students to have this kind of practice with the aim of developing students' spoken fluency". The rest of this lesson will look at ways of developing spoken fluency practice.

Key Skill

Students often lack the confidence to just speak and not worry about making mistakes. Spending time in the classroom helping them to develop some degree of oral fluency can go some way towards giving them confidence to speak freely and not be overly concerned with accuracy.

Task 2 – Different kinds of speaking activities

Below is a list of different kinds of speaking activities (1 - 8). Match these to the descriptions of the activities (a – h).

Speaking activities	
1. discussion	**2.** questionnaire
3. ranking activity	**4.** jigsaw activity
5. role-play	**6.** simulation
7. communication game	**8.** problem solving activity

Descriptions

a. Students read brief restaurant reviews then discuss an order for a list of restaurants from the best to worst.

b. Students are given a logic puzzle and talk about possible answers in pairs or small groups.

c. In groups students pretend they are having a city council meeting to decide if some trees in the main street should be cut down or not. Each student has a different role to play, but they use their own names.

d. In small groups, students put forward their ideas about global warming and what should be done about it.

e. Students work in pairs, each with a picture. Both pictures are very similar, but there are some small differences. Without showing each other their pictures, they describe their pictures in order to spot the differences.

f. Students move around the class asking each other about their last holiday destination as well as their ideal holiday destination.

g. Different students read different information about a murder mystery. They form a group and share their information in order to try and solve the mystery.

h. In pairs, students pretend to be neighbours. One neighbour thinks his partner a bit too noisy

Check your ideas in the answer key.

Key Skill

There is a great variety of activities available to get students speaking. Some of the activities above can belong to more than one category. For example, **g** the jigsaw activity can also be seen as a problem solving activity. A key component of successful speaking activities is an <u>information gap</u> where one speaker knows something that the other speaker doesn't and there is a real reason to communicate.

Task 3 – A typical speaking lesson

Below are some steps in a typical lesson that aims to develop spoken fluency. Put these steps in the most logical order.

Typical lessons	Order
a. The teacher elicits or gives feedback either on the content or the performance of the speaking activity.	
b. The students spend some time planning the content of the speaking activity.	
c. The teacher introduces the speaking activity and perhaps provides some information input that will help students carry out the activity.	
d. The teacher gives feedback on the language that students used in the activity and might highlight and correct mistakes that learners made during the activity.	
e. The teacher gives instructions for the activity. This might mean that the students read some instructions or perhaps role cards.	
f. The students do the speaking activity and the teacher monitors and listens in on their progress.	

Check your ideas in the answer key.

Key Skill

Speaking lessons like any other lesson need careful setting up. If you hand out role cards for a role play and expect students to start speaking immediately, you will probably be disappointed. Students need to understand the context, the instructions on the role card and have a little time to think about what they want to say and how they are going to say it.

The order of the final 2 steps could be reversed. However, it pays to focus on content before rushing to do error correction, which could send a slightly negative message to students.

Task 4 – Managing speaking activities

Decide if the following ideas for speaking activities are "useful or "not so useful". Jot down why you think so.

Ideas for managing speaking activities
1. It pays to give students some thinking time before they speak.   *Useful*   *Not so useful*
2. It's useful to do as much error correction as possible while students are talking.   *Useful*   *Not so useful*
3. You need to think carefully about grouping and pairing students for speaking activities.   *Useful*   *Not so useful*
4. It doesn't really matter what topic you choose for speaking activities. Students can talk about anything.   *Useful*   *Not so useful*
5. It's a good idea to encourage students to think about their speaking speed to make them sound more fluent.   *Useful*   *Not so useful*
6. It is sometimes helpful to base a speaking lesson on a reading or a listening lesson.   *Useful*   *Not so useful*

Check your ideas in the answer key.

⮑ Thinking about your teaching …

Over a period of time, monitor and record your students' reactions to different speaking activities. Decide how motivated they were to speak and how quickly they began speaking once you had set the activity up. Finally, evaluate how much language the activity generates. Did students speak for a long or a short amount of time? If you feel the speaking lesson was not successful, try to work out why this was the case, using the "useful" and "not very useful" ideas in task 4.

Note your observations in your *Teaching log*.

⮑ Taking it to the classroom …

To help you plan speaking lessons that your learners enjoy, try doing some evaluation of each speaking activity you do once it is over. Ask students what they feel they got out of the activity and how much it motivated them. Perhaps get them to discuss these ideas in small groups then give your own feedback. It will also give them further speaking fluency practice.

⮑ Want to find out more … ?

On pages 146 - 163 of *Learning Teaching (2nd edition)* by Jim Scrivener (Macmillan 2005), there is further reading on spoken fluency practice, including teaching ideas.

On pages 343 - 363 of *The Practice of English Language Teaching (4th edition)* by Jeremy Harmer (Pearson 2007), there is further reading on spoken fluency practice, including classroom speaking activities and speaking lesson sequences.

⮑ Related TaskBook lessons...

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

- **Unit 3 f) Speaking strategies:** *Discusses useful skills and strategies associated with successful oral communication.*
- **Unit 5 g) Using drama activities:** *Discusses how adding an element of drama to activities may help motivate students to speak in English.*

Answer Key 🔑

Task 2 – Feedback

1. d (discussion)
2. f (questionnaire)
3. a (ranking activity)
4. g (jigsaw activity)
5. h (role play)
6. c (simulation)
7. e (communication game)
8. b (problem solving activity)

Task 3 – Feedback

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

Task 4 – Feedback

1. *Useful - students need time to organise not only their ideas, but also their language.*

2. *Not so useful - this might interrupt the flow of speech or inhibit students in some way, particularly at lower levels when learners tend to have less confidence.*

3. *Useful - putting students together who have very different abilities or who do not get on can mean that students will be reluctant to speak.*

4. *Not so useful - if a topic is not familiar or interesting to learners, they won't want to speak about it. You need to think carefully about learners' interests and needs.*

5. *Not so useful as this might put unnecessary pressure on them and inhibit their speaking. Fluency and speed is not the same thing.*

6. *Useful - the content of a reading or listening text will give learners something to talk about and may provide useful background information for the speaking.*

Do you sometimes feel that your students speak English well enough, but you are not sure of their ability to communicate effectively with native speakers? This lesson will help you to understand skills and strategies associated with oral communication that can be useful for your students. It will give you ideas on how to highlight these aspects of oral interaction with your students.

Task 1 – Jenny's exam students

Jenny: I've got two students who are going to be doing an important speaking test next month. We did a practice test today. The students' grammar is fairly correct, they have good vocabulary and their pronunciation is clear enough. The problem is I still sometimes have problems following what they're trying to say. For example, at one stage in the practice test I suddenly noticed that they had changed the topic of the conversation without me realising it! I feel there's something I should be teaching them, but I am not quite sure what that is.

Have you got any ideas of how you can help Jenny?
Jot down your advice on a note pad, then check the answer key below.

Task 1 Feedback
Jenny could help her students communicate more clearly by getting them to focus on some core speaking skills and strategies. The following tasks will help you understand what these are.

Key Skill
The teaching of speaking involves more than just providing students with speaking fluency practice. Teachers need to focus on skills and strategies that will help students negotiate meaning and communicate effectively with other people.

Task 2 – Identifying skills and strategies

1 to 6 below are speaking skills and strategies. a – f are definitions of these strategies, and i to vi are examples. Match the speaking skills and strategies with the definitions and examples.

Speaking skills and strategies	Definitions	Examples
1. Turn taking		
2. Repair		
3. Seeking clarification		
4. Feedback		
5. Boundary or transition marking		
6. Paralinguistic devices		

Definitions

a. Asking the person you are speaking to explain something they have said

b. Using things like body language, gesture and eye contact to send a message to the person you are speaking to
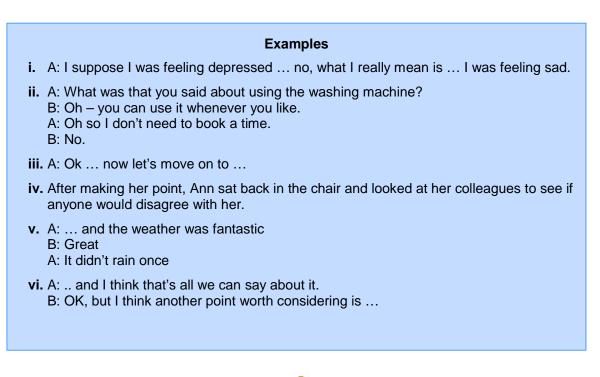
c. Signalling that you have finished speaking or knowing when and how to get into a conversation

d. Indicating that you have finished talking about a topic and perhaps also showing that you are about to introduce a new topic into the conversation.

e. Correcting yourself when you speak, or rephrasing something when you feel the person you are talking to hasn't understood.

f. Using small words or sounds to indicate to the speaker that you are listening to what they are saying.

Examples

i.   A: I suppose I was feeling depressed … no, what I really mean is … I was feeling sad.

ii. A: What was that you said about using the washing machine?
     B: Oh – you can use it whenever you like.
     A: Oh so I don't need to book a time.
     B: No.

iii. A: Ok … now let's move on to …

iv. After making her point, Ann sat back in the chair and looked at her colleagues to see if anyone would disagree with her.

v.   A: … and the weather was fantastic
     B: Great
     A: It didn't rain once

vi. A: .. and I think that's all we can say about it.
     B: OK, but I think another point worth considering is …

Check your ideas in the answer key. 🔑

Key Skill

These micro skills do not necessarily generate spoken language, but they do ease spoken communication between two speakers. Many of these micro skills are realised in very different ways in different languages and cultures. For example, many native speakers of English find there are cultures where people stand too close to them during a conversation, or they may find that the person they speak to is not giving them enough feedback. For this reason, it is important to focus on these skills. They can avoid misunderstandings and break downs in communication.

> ### Task 3 – Spoken genre and speaking skills and strategies

Letters a to e below are different spoken genre. Decide which 2 of the following 5 speaking skills and strategies are most likely to be used in each spoken genre. You need to think about both the speaker and the listener.

NB. Paralinguistic devices are not included here because they are likely to be used with all the genres.

Speaking skills and strategies	
1. Turn taking	**2.** Repair
3. Seeking clarification	**4.** Feedback
5. Boundary or transition marking	

Spoken genre	Speaking skills and strategies	
a. Telling a story to a friend.	**i.**	**ii.**
b. Giving instructions of how to download pictures from a digital camera to a computer.	**i.**	**ii.**
c. A business meeting.	**i.**	**ii.**
d. Social chatting with friends.	**i.**	**ii.**
e. Explaining a medical problem to a doctor.	**i.**	**ii.**

Check your ideas in the answer key. 🔑

Key Skill

Many of these micro skills are more typically found in some spoken genre as opposed to others. When preparing speaking lessons, it is a good idea to ask yourself if there are any typical micro skills associated with that genre then aim to highlight these during the lesson.

Task 4 – Teaching ideas for speaking skills and strategies

Numbers 1 to 5 describe different tasks that can help develop students' awareness of speaking skills and strategies. Letters a to e describe activities that can be included with these tasks. Match the tasks to activities.

Tasks	Activities
1. Students analyse a transcript of some authentic native speaker interaction.	
2. Students watch an authentic video or DVD of native speakers performing specific spoken genre.	
3. Students perform a speaking task in small groups. One of the students takes the role of observer.	
4. The teacher films students performing a specific spoken genre.	
5. The teacher gives students invented words or phrases to use in a conversation.	

Activities

a. The filmed item is played back to students who evaluate their ability to use speaking strategies and communicate clearly.

b. The excerpt is played without sound and the teacher asks students to focus on the body language and eye contact that native speakers use.

c. The students try to drop the word or expression into the conversation thereby forcing the other student to seek clarification.

d. The teacher asks students to find and underline specific words or expressions that are used as speaking strategies.

e. The observer is asked to focus on two or three speaking strategies and evaluate the group's effectiveness. After the activity the observer gives feedback to the group on these strategies.

➲ Thinking about your teaching …

Many published teaching materials see speaking either as freer practice of language or as spoken fluency. Study the course book or materials you are currently using and see if there is any explicit focus on speaking skills and strategies.   If there is, could you add any more? If there are not, can you think how you can add a focus on skills and strategies to a fluency activity. Try to create a speaking skills and strategies mini-syllabus that matches other speaking activities in your teaching programme.

Write up your mini-syllabus in your *Teaching log*.

➲ Taking it to the classroom …

After doing a lesson that focus on speaking skills and strategies, ask your students to evaluate it. Give them some questions to talk about (for example, what was useful in this lesson? What was easy / difficult for you? What do you think you need more practice in?). You can ask the questions in an open class situation or students can talk about them in small groups and give you feedback on their discussion.

➲ Want to find out more … ?

On pages 27 - 31 of *How to Teach Speaking* by Scott Thornbury (Pearson 2005), there is further reading on speaking skills and communication strategies.

On pages 163 - 169 of *Learning Teaching* by Jim Scrivener (Macmillan 2005), there is further reading on speaking skills and genre.

➲ Related TaskBook lessons...

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

- **Unit 3 e) Speaking fluency:** *Discusses how different kinds of speaking activities can help get your students talking.*
- **Unit 5 g) Using drama activities:** *Discusses how adding an element of drama to activities may help motivate students to speak in English.*

| **Answer Key** | 🔑 |

Task 2 – Feedback

1. Turning taking	**c.** and **vi.**
2. Repair	**e.** and **i.**
3. Seeking clarification	**a.** and **ii.**
4. Feedback	**f.** and **v.**
5. Boundary or transition marking	**d.** and **iii.**
6. Paralinguistic devices	**b.** and **iv.**

Task 3 – Feedback

a. Telling a story to a friend.
i. Boundary or transition marking   **ii.** Feedback
Comment: The speaker will signal transitions from one stage in the story to the next. The listener will give feedback to indicate that he or she is listening.

b. Giving instructions of how to download pictures from a digital camera to a computer.
i. Repair   **ii.** Seeking clarification
Comment: The speaker is likely to rephrase more complex instructions if he or she feels the listener has not understood (perhaps because they do something wrong). The listener may also ask for certain points to be clarified.

c. A business meeting.
i. Turn taking   **ii.** Seeking clarification
Comment: All speakers will need to be aware when other participants in a meeting have finished speaking, or they may want to interrupt. Different ideas will be put forward at the meeting by individual speakers and other participants may want more detail or further explanation of those ideas.

d. Social chatting with friends.
i. Turn taking   **ii.** Boundary or transition marking
Comment: All participants in the conversation will need to be aware of when they can enter the conversation. Social chatting can often cover a large range of topics, so transitions will need to be clearly signalled.

e. Explaining a medical problem to a doctor.
i. Repair   **ii.** Seeking clarification
Comment: The patient may need to repair what they say to the doctor to make sure he or she understands the symptoms. The doctor is likely to ask for more information about the symptoms from the patient.

Task 4 – Feedback

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

Do you sometimes worry that your writing lessons are nothing more than practice? Are there features of written language that you feel that you are not focusing on? This lesson looks at some of those features and outlines a typical procedure for writing lessons.

Task 1 – Cassie's exam class

Cassie: "I am teaching a Cambridge First Certificate class at the moment. I've never taught an exam class like this before. I've been giving my students lots of writing practice using old exam papers. However, they have told me that they want more on writing. We're doing two practice writing tasks each week. I'm not sure what they mean."

Can you help Cassie? What do you think her students mean? Jot down your ideas and suggestions on a note pad, then look at the answer key below.

Task 1 Feedback

The students may be voicing their frustration at only practising writing and might want some kind of analysis of the genres they have to focus on in the FCE exam. While providing practice opportunities is important, this alone will not necessarily develop students' skills in these areas, in the same way as merely practising grammar without providing any kind of clarification will not necessarily develop students' grammar accuracy.

Key Skill

Written language has its own specific features and conventions. These will often differ from one language to another. It is useful for learners if you focus on these features in an explicit way when doing writing lessons.

Task 2 – Differences between written and spoken language

Numbers 1 to 6 below are typical features of spoken language. Letters a to f are their counterparts in written language. Match the spoken and written features.

Spoken features	Written features
1. When we speak, we use stress, intonation and pausing to highlight specific pieces of information and to help listeners understand what we are saying.	
2. Spoken language is spontaneous and is usually not recorded in any way.	
3. When people speak there is usually someone who is listening and can give feedback to the speaker.	
4. When people speak, their sentences are sometimes incomplete and they change their mind about how they will say something in the middle of a sentence.	
5. Speakers often use facial expression, gesture and body language to add meaning to what they are saying.	
6. When people speak, they plan and organise their language as they go and not a long time in advance.	

Features of Written Language

a. In written language there is a greater expectation of accuracy in language features such as grammar, vocabulary and spelling.

b. Writers tend to think about what they are going to write and how they are going to write it before they begin writing.

c. Written language is usually fixed on the page so that people can return to the text as often as they like.

d. When we write, we use punctuation to help signpost the message of written texts.

e. Writers often never find out what readers think of their text. However, e-mail and texting are kinds of writing where writers will receive some response to their message.

f. Paragraphing and layout are used in written language to make the message clearer.

Check your ideas in the answer key. 🔑

> **Key Skill**
>
> While it is true that writing requires more accurate use of language than speaking, grammatical accuracy is not the only feature of written language to focus on in the classroom. Nor is it a good idea to see written language as a collection of correct sentences. It is a good idea to see a piece of writing as a whole text with its own conventions.

Task 3 – Steps in a typical writing lesson

Letters a to i below show steps in a typical writing lesson. Put these steps into what you think is an appropriate order.

Steps in a Writing Lesson	Order
a. Students brainstorm ideas for their own text.	
b. The teacher checks understanding of the model text using some kind of comprehension task.	
c. Students write their final draft of the text.	
d. Students do an activity that aims to practise the highlighted written feature.	
e. The teacher provides a lead in to the topic of the model text.	
f. Students get feedback on the first draft from their peers or from the teacher.	
g. The teacher hands out the model text.	
h. Students write the first draft of their text.	
i. The teacher highlights one or two features of the model text (e.g. paragraphing, linking devices) by means of a discovery task.	

Check your ideas in the answer key. 🔑

Key Skill

The suggested procedure above follows what is generally understood to be a 'product approach' to writing, in that the teacher aims to get the students to *produce* a piece of written text. This is not the only approach (see the related lesson on process writing), but it can be useful when teaching exam classes where students need to be able to deploy specific genres.

Task 4 – Specific activities

Numbers 1 to 8 below describe some specific activities that teachers can use in the classroom to focus on features of written language. Sort these activities into the two categories in the box below, thinking about whether they focus on language accuracy, or on the text as a whole.

Focus on language accuracy	Focus on the text as a whole

Activities

1. Ask students to make a more complex sentence from two simple sentences using a linking device.

2. Get students to organise cut up parts of a model text so that it follows the correct format and layout.

3. Get students to think very clearly about who will read the text.

4. Ask students to organise a continuous stream of text into paragraphs.

5. Give students a text with spelling mistakes and ask them to identify and correct these. Set a time limit and allow limited dictionary support.

6. Ask students to think about why they are writing a particular text – what is its purpose?

7. Give students a text with no punctuation and ask them to add full stops, capital letters, commas etc.

8. Ask students to find out what different pronouns refer back or forward to in a text.

Check your ideas in the answer key.

⮌ Thinking about your teaching …

It is easy to think of the kind of texts that students need to be able to write when they are studying in exam classes. However, what about when they are studying general English at a lower level? Over a period of time, conduct an on-going needs analysis with students who are not in exam classes. Get them to tell you what kind of texts they feel they would like to write.

Note your conclusions in your *Teaching Log*.

⮌ Taking it to the classroom …

The approach described in task 3 is only a suggested approach. It is also possible to start with the product and work backwards. You can ask your students to write a text without having read a model or example. Having done this, students could look at a model and notice differences between their first drafts and the model text. They could then re-write the first draft incorporating features they have noticed. This approach is similar to a task-based model of teaching and learning.

⮌ Want to find out more … ?

Pages 323 - 342 of *The Practice of English Language Teaching (4th edition)* by Jeremy Harmer (Pearson 2007) contain more ideas for focusing on both language accuracy and the whole text in writing lessons.

Pages 192 – 205 of *Learning Teaching (2nd edition)* by Jim Scrivener (Macmillan 2005) include further reading on staging successful writing lessons.

⮌ Related TaskBook lessons...

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

• **Unit 3 h) Writing 2: a Process approach** (*a useful follow-up to this lesson*)

Answer Key 🔑

Task 2 – Feedback

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

Task 4 – Feedback

Language accuracy: 1, 5, 7, 8

Whole text: 2, 3, 4, 6

Task 3 – Feedback

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

Do you sometimes wonder what people mean when they talk about 'process writing'? This lesson looks at a **process** approach to writing and shows how it differs from a very strictly **product** approach. It describes a procedure for process writing and gives some teaching ideas. Before you complete this lesson, it may be useful to have looked at *Writing 1: A product approach and features of written language*.

Task 1 – A process quiz

What are your beliefs about how we structure and manage writing lessons? Take this short quiz to find out. Write 'yes' or 'no' next to each statement, then check your ideas with the answer key below.

Statements	Yes/No?
1. Students should learn to write correct sentences and build them up into a text.	
2. In writing classes, there is a strong emphasis on correct grammar.	
3. In writing classes, you should focus on what the student produces at the end of the lesson.	
4. Classroom writing is by its nature 'inauthentic' and it is impossible to make it real.	
5. Writing in the classroom takes a lot of time and is often a waste of time.	
6. Students have to work alone on writing activities.	
7. Teachers should mark all the grammar mistakes that students make.	
8. All written language can be considered formal language.	

Task 1 Feedback

• If you answered all these questions with '**yes'**, then your view of developing writing skills is strongly product-orientated, and it might be interesting for you to explore the different approach outlined in this lesson.

• If you had a lot of '**no'** answers, then you probably already have some awareness of a process approach, but it might be useful for you to look at the ideas in this lesson and see if you can develop techniques further.

Key Skill

A central idea in process writing is to move away from the view that written texts are a collection of grammatically correct sentences. Process writing is connected with the different sub skills that first language writers of English use when they write.

Task 2 – Some alternatives

Numbers 1 to 8 repeat the descriptions of a product approach to writing in task 1. Letters a to h describe some alternatives to this view that are usually associated with the process approach. Match the alternatives to the descriptions.

Descriptions of a product approach	Process approach
1. Students should learn to write correct sentences and build them up into a text.	
2. In writing classes, there is a strong emphasis on correct grammar.	
3. In writing classes, you should focus on what the student produces at the end of the lesson.	
4. Classroom writing is by its nature 'inauthentic' and it is impossible to make it real.	
5. Writing in the classroom takes a lot of time and is often a waste of time.	
6. Students have to work alone on writing activities.	
7. Teachers should mark all the grammar mistakes that students make.	
8. All written language can be considered formal language.	

Alternatives associated with the process approach

a. In class, students can write a letter or e-mail message to an organisation or publication that exists and send the letter or message.

b. Teachers' feedback should refer to the ideas expressed in a text and the way in which they are organised.

c. When students brainstorm and plan written work, they also get useful speaking practice.

d. It helps students to look at an example model text of what they are writing so they can understand how this works as a whole.

e. Teachers should expose students to a range of different written genres because they will be writing using different registers.

f. From the outset, teachers should encourage students to think of a piece of writing as a piece of communication that gets a message across.

g. A lot of writing activities such as brainstorming, planning and revising can be done in pairs or small groups.

h. An important part of writing lessons is to get students to understand that the writing process is made up of many sub skills that can help them to create texts.

Check your ideas in the answer key. 🔑

> ### Key Skill
> The process approach means that students begin to see writing as a communication tool. This means it is important to think about *why* the text is being written and *who* is likely to read it. It also shows that the writing of a text is not a one-off event, but a process made up of several steps.

Task 3 – A procedure for process writing

Letters a to h show typical stages or steps in a process writing lesson. Place these in a logical order.

Stages in a Process Writing Lesson	Order
a. Students get feedback from their peers or from the teacher on what they have written.	
b. Students reformulate some of the language in the text.	
c. The teacher asks students to talk about the purpose of the text they will write.	
d. Students brainstorm ideas and/or, if necessary, do some research on the topic of the text.	
e. Students write a first draft of the text.	
f. Students write a final draft of the text.	
g. Students reconsider some of the ideas in the text and revise their organisation.	
h. Students think about and discuss how their ideas can most effectively be organised.	

Check your ideas in the answer key. 🔑

Key Skill

The procedure outlined in task 3 could take place over an extended period of time rather than in the course of one individual lesson. For example, students might do brainstorming and discussion of the purpose and organisation of the text in class and then write the first draft as homework. The revising and reformulating might take place two or three days after that.

Task 4 – Individual tasks

Numbers 1 to 8 repeat the steps in a process writing lesson, but this time they are in the correct order. Letters a to h provide examples of a classroom activities. Match the activities to the steps.

Steps in a process writing lesson	Activities
1. Students brainstorm ideas and/or, if necessary, do some research on the topic of the text.	
2. The teacher asks students to talk about the purpose of the text they will write.	
3. Students think about and discuss how their ideas can be organised.	
4. Students write a first draft of the text.	
5. Students get feedback from their peers, or from the teacher, on what they have written.	
6. Students reconsider some of the ideas in the text and revise their organisation.	
7. Students reformulate some of the language in the text.	
8. Students write a final draft of the text.	

Classroom activities

a. In pairs or small groups, students look at their notes and discuss how they can be organised into paragraphs.

b. Students decide whether they need to cut or add information to their text and review the paragraphing.

c. If the topic of the text voices a personal opinion, students should write alone. However, if the topic is not personal, students could write in pairs or small groups.

d. Students look at the teacher's language feedback and change the grammar and vocabulary if necessary.

e. The teacher encourages the students to use mind maps and provides articles that might be of use.

f. This can be word processed for the sake of final presentation.

g. The teacher asks the students to discuss and note down who will read the text and what the reader will need to do as a result of reading the text.

h. One pair should exchange their draft with another pair. The teacher can monitor and make suggestions.

➲ Thinking about your teaching …

Try doing some writing lessons that follow a process approach to developing writing skills. As you work through these lessons, note students' reactions to different parts of the process. Where do they have strengths? Where do they have weaknesses? Why do you think this is the case?

Note your conclusions in your *Teaching Log*.

➲ Taking it to the classroom …

The one step that students (and teachers) tend to forget about in this process is the second one where students should think of the audience of the text and the outcome (if there is one). Try and make this a standard feature of any writing lesson that you do.

➲ Want to find out more … ?

Pages 300 to 312 of *Teaching and Learning in the Language Classroom* by Tricia Hedge (Oxford University Press 2000) contain extra reading on process writing.

Pages 325 - 326 of *The Practice of English Language Teaching (4th edition)* by Jeremy Harmer (Pearson 2007) discuss the differences between a product and a process approach.

➲ Related TaskBook lessons...

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

• **Unit 3 g) Writing 1: a product approach and features of written language**
(*a useful precursor to this lesson*)

Answer Key

Task 2 – Feedback

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

Task 3 – Feedback

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

Task 4 – Feedback

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

Do some of your low level learners seem to have problems with reading and writing? This lesson looks at kinds of literacy problems that students can have and makes some suggestions on how you can deal with these.

Task 1 – An unusual student

Joshua has a student called Tony in his pre intermediate class. Tony is very communicative and, for his level, speaks English well. However, Joshua has noted that Tony is reluctant to copy examples of new language from the white board. He sometimes seems to struggle with reading, but can often give answers to tasks after student-centred feedback. Joshua wonders whether Tony might have literacy problems.

What do you think?
Jot down your ideas on a notepad, then check the answer key below.

Task 1 Feedback

It is quite possible that Tony does have literacy issues. Students who find reading and writing difficult can often be good at listening and speaking and can hide their literacy problems with a series of coping strategies. For example, Tony might not be able to read texts at all, but is able to pick up answers to reading tasks from his partner during student-centred feedback.

Key Skill

In English language classrooms, literacy problems can arise because a student's first language does not have a Roman script and they need to learn this. However, in other cases, students may have literacy issues in their first language and learning English may mean they are having to deal with written and spoken language for the first time.

Task 2 – What kind of problem is it?

Numbers 1 to 8 describe typical literacy problems for students. Sort the problems into ones primarily associated with reading and ones associated writing.

Reading problems	Writing problems

Typical literacy problems

1. Students can't spell words.

2. Students have problems dealing with left to right orientation of texts.

3. A word written in cursive and the same word written in italics seem like two different words.

4. Students find it difficult to hold a pen correctly.

5. Students are unsure whether they should use upper or lower case for certain words.

6. Students cannot see where a word begins and ends when it is placed in continuous text.

7. Students are unable to form letters in Roman script.

8. Students find it difficult to work out where sentences begin and end in continuous text.

Check your ideas in the answer key.

Key Skill

While the problems described above seem very basic, it is useful to consider how well native English speakers would cope with a non-Roman script that is not familiar to them, for example, Arabic. In this situation, being able to perform simple tasks such as recognising the correct number on a bus becomes extremely difficult.

Task 3 – Getting started

Below are some general ideas for when you get started with helping students with literacy problems. Choose the best alternative a) or b) for each idea.

	Ideas to help students with literacy problems
1.	**a.** You should use small fonts for words and texts **b.** You should focus on large fonts for words and texts.
2.	**a.** You should begin with listening and speaking then lead to reading and writing. **b.** You should begin with reading and writing then lead to listening and speaking.
3.	**a.** Start out by focusing on individual words. **b.** Start our by focusing on short and simple sentences.
4.	**a.** You should try and use visuals together with words and text as much as possible. **b.** You should try and avoid using visuals with words and texts.
5.	**a.** It helps to use a published picture dictionary. **b.** It helps for students to build up and create their own dictionary.
6.	**a.** When it's time to deal with sentences, students should try and create their own. **b.** When it's time to deal with sentences, students should copy examples.

Check your ideas in the answer key.

Key Skill

A general principle when teaching literacy is to move from reading and writing to listening and speaking, and to begin with letters and words. It is difficult to get students to reproduce what they cannot perceive. Secondly, it is not a good idea to expect creativity too soon in the literacy development process.

Task 4 – Some specific activities

Below is a list of some specific activities to help develop literacy (1-12). Decide if each activity will help develop reading skills or writing skills.

Reading skills	Writing skills

Activities to help develop literacy

1. Give regular spelling tests.

2. Students do dot joining and tracing tasks to create letters.

3. Students match the same word written in two different fonts.

4. Students recognise and/or match letters words written on flashcards.

5. Students match words to pictures.

6. Students copy written work that has been rewritten and reformulated by the teacher.

7. Students are given words from a simple sentence to order.

8. Students are asked to identify very simple texts such as a bank deposit slip or a bus timetable.

9. Students complete simple gapped sentences.

10. The teacher highlights core spelling rules and patterns.

11. Students labels pictures and diagrams.

12. Students complete simple forms.

Check your ideas in the answer key. 🔑

⮡ Thinking about your teaching …

Try learning the alphabet (or characters) and some words in a language that has a script that you are not familiar with. What frustrations do you experience? How does this experience inform the way you can deal with students who have literacy problems.

Note your observations in your Teaching log.

⮡ Taking it to the classroom …

Often learners with literacy problems are placed in classes with students who do not have these problems. This will mean adapting materials that you use and providing these students with a bit of extra support. For example, rather than getting them to do a controlled written practice task, you could ask them to copy the correct answers.

⮡ Want to find out more … ?

On pages 323 - 325 of *Learning Teaching (2nd edition)* by Jim Scrivener (Macmillan 2005), there is further reading on literacy.

| **Answer Key** | 🔑 |

Task 2 – Feedback

Reading problems: 2, 3, 6 and 8
Writing problems: 1, 4, 5 and 7

Task 3 – Feedback

1. b. You should focus on large fonts for words and texts.
   Comment: Larger typeface is clearer and easier to read.

2. a. You should begin with listening and speaking then lead to reading and writing.
   Comment: This means you move from what students can already do to what is new for them.

3. a. Start out by focusing on individual words.
   Comment: Students needs to become familiar with words first so they can then begin to recognise word boundaries in a sentence.

4. a. You should try and use visuals together with words and text as much as possible.
   Comment: Visuals are a very straightforward and concrete way of conveying the meaning of new language items.

5. b. It helps for students to build up and create their own dictionary.
   Comment: Words students have collected are likely to be more meaningful for them.

6. b. When it's time to deal with sentences, students should copy examples.
   Comment: For students to create their own sentences puts pressure on the grammatical ability when they are still trying to deal with the way in which we record language in a written form.

Task 4 – Feedback

Reading skills: 3, 4, 5, 7, 8 and 10
Writing skills: 1, 2, 6, 9, 11, and 12