

Do you sometimes feel unsure about teaching pronunciation? Do you wonder when you should teach it and how to go about it? This lesson aims to explore these issues by investigating general principles associated with the teaching of pronunciation and then looking at ideas of when and what to teach.

Task 1 – A difference of opinion.

The following discussion took place in the staffroom between Tom and Liz:

Tom: I was doing a pronunciation lesson and most of my students just couldn't get it.

Liz: Couldn't get what?

Tom: Just the right sound.

Liz: How right did you want them to sound?

Tom: As near as possible to a native speaker.

Liz: Why bother? So long as they can be understood.

Tom: But they just sound so foreign.

Liz: I don't agree.



Whose opinion do you agree with, and why? Jot down your answer on a note pad, then check the answer in the key below. 

Task 1 Feedback

Tom seems to want his students to sound like native speakers of English, while Liz thinks that intelligibility is a more acceptable standard. Many students find it hard achieving a native-speaker like sound, and many have no wish to lose their accent. Current thinking on this topic suggests that Liz's point of view is preferable because it is more realistic and takes into account learners' wants and needs to a larger degree.

Key Skill

While aiming to get students sounding like native speakers may be an unrealistic goal, ensuring that you have some explicit focus on pronunciation is a key (and often neglected) aspect of an English language programme. Areas to focus on are: sounds, word stress, sentence stress, connected speech and intonation.

Task 2 – Some general principles



Numbers 1 to 6 outline some general principles associated with the teaching of pronunciation. Letters a to f are a series of rationales for the principles. Match the rationales to the principles.

General Principles	Rationales
1. In a pronunciation lesson it is a good idea to get students listening before they speak.	
2. Teachers need to model pronunciation features clearly before they ask students to repeat.	
3. It helps students if you provide a white board model of the features that you have practised.	
4. Sometimes it is a good idea to get learners to analyse the pronunciation of an utterance in pairs.	
5. Having heard or analysed a pronunciation feature, students need plenty of oral practice.	
6. Teachers need to give students plenty of feedback on their pronunciation.	

Rationales

- a. This might lead to students being able to work out a rule that is applicable to other language.
- b. This encourages students to listen carefully to sounds.
- c. This means that you are able to target very specific problems that individual learners of different nationalities have.
- d. Some learners need this kind of visual support because they do not have an 'aural memory'.
- e. Pronunciation is something that learners need to actively do rather than passively study.
- f. At low levels there are some sounds and intonation patterns that non-native speakers cannot hear so they need plenty of exposure to them.

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Key Skill

Pronunciation is something that students need to experience rather than think about too much. Teachers can help them do this by ensuring that they focus strongly on listening and speaking skills in pronunciation lessons. Some written analysis is useful, but it should always lead to productive practice.

Task 3 – When to teach pronunciation



Numbers 1 to 5 describe different situations in which teachers can focus on pronunciation. Letters a to e briefly describe classroom activities associated with the teaching of pronunciation. Match the activities to the situations.

Situations	Activities
1. The teacher includes a separate pronunciation spot within a normal lesson.	
2. The teacher focuses on pronunciation at the same time as they are teaching grammar or vocabulary.	
3. The teacher gets students to focus on a feature of pronunciation in a text after doing listening skills practice.	
4. The teacher devotes an entire lesson to some aspect of pronunciation.	
5. The teacher gives feedback on some language that students have produced.	

Classroom activities

- a. Students read and listen to a short excerpt and mark features of connected speech on the audio script.
- b. After a freer communication activity the teacher notes pronunciation problems on the white board for students to correct.
- c. The teacher does a 20-minute warmer activity that focuses on the difference between two sounds e.g. /i:/ vs. /I/.
- d. The teacher uses prompts to elicit, model and drill the target structure.
- e. Students listen to, analyse and do a variety of practice activities, focusing on different intonation patterns.

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Key Skill

The different situations outlined in task 3 can be summarised under two headings – whether pronunciation should be taught in isolation or whether it should be integrated into other lessons. Ideally teachers should try to include both approaches in their teaching programmes.

Task 4 – Specific activities



Numbers 1 to 5 in the box are features of pronunciation. Letters a to j are specific activities. Match the activities to the features. Each feature has two activities.

Features of Pronunciation	Activities
1. sounds	
2. word stress	
3. utterance or sentence stress	
4. connected speech	
5. intonation	

Activities

- a. Drilling students in ways of making requests and ensuring that they sound polite.
- b. A student gives another student an incorrect piece of information. The second student corrects the first student by repeating the initial sentence with the correct information.
- c. The teacher shows students a diagram of the mouth and different positions for the speech organs.
- d. The teacher asks students to listen to three sentences from a listening text and count the number of weak forms /ə/ they hear.
- e. The teacher models and drills new vocabulary.
- f. The teacher gives students a series of messages in note form. Students have to practise saying these as fully formed utterances.
- g. Students have to listen for the difference between minimal pairs of words, for example, 'ship' versus 'sheep'.
- h. The teacher asks the students to listen for the speaker's attitude in a dialogue.
- i. The teacher models and drills a new utterance, highlighting sounds that disappear and run into each other.
- j. The teacher asks students to sort vocabulary into different categories according to their pronunciation.

Check your ideas in the answer key. 🗝️

Thinking about your teaching ...

Over the course of a term, note how often you focus on teaching pronunciation. Also consider whether your focus on pronunciation is mostly integrated into language lessons or whether it is isolated. Evaluate whether you think you are doing enough pronunciation. Do you need to integrate more? Or, do you need to do more one-off pronunciation lessons?

Note your conclusions in your *Teaching Log*.

Taking it to the classroom ...

Often teachers forget to analyse the pronunciation of new grammar structures or functions that they teach. Try doing this on a regular basis. Look at your example sentences and work out the main stresses, look for features of connected speech and decide whether intonation is important or not. It sometimes helps to do this together with a colleague. It might make your drilling more effective.

Want to find out more ... ?

Pages 248 to 264 of *The Practice of English Language Teaching (4th edition)* by Jeremy Harmer (Pearson 2007) contain extra reading on teaching pronunciation.

Pages 284 to 297 of *Learning Teaching (2nd Edition)* by Jim Scrivener (Macmillan 2005) also contain extra reading on teaching pronunciation.

See also section 5 of *Language Teaching Classroom Practice DVD & Workbook* by Heather Richards and Karen Wise (AUT University 2007).

Answer Key



Task 2 – Feedback

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

Task 4 – Feedback

- 1) c and g
- 2) e and j
- 3) b and f
- 4) d and i
- 5) a and h

Task 3 – Feedback

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



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Are you sometimes unsure about the best way to deal with vocabulary in different kinds of lessons? This lesson will help you make better decisions on different approaches.

Task 1 – Emily’s pace

Student feedback

Emily prepared her vocabulary lesson thoroughly. She taught 12 new words associated with the topic of ecology and prepared good questions to elicit words and check their meaning. During the lesson, she felt things dragged a little bit. After the lesson, one of the students told her in the nicest possible way that it seemed to take a long time to learn the new words.



How could Emily have made the vocabulary lesson more interesting for her students and improved the pace? Jot down your answers on a note pad, then check the answer key below. 🗝️

Task 1 Feedback 🗝️

It seems that Emily elicited each word individually. Twelve is quite a large number of words with which to do this and it probably meant she had a very long teacher-fronted stage in her lesson. Because all the words were on the same topic it might have been better to use a student-centred worksheet for the vocabulary. For example, students could have matched words to definitions or labelled a diagram or something similar. This means that learners would be more actively engaged in learning the words and would determine their own learning rate rather than being fully dependent on the teacher.

Key Skill

There are 3 key ways of teaching vocabulary to students: 1) by means of teacher-fronted elicitation or explanation; 2) by means of a student-centred vocabulary task; 3) by getting students to work out the meaning of new words they find in a text using the context to help them.

Task 2 – What’s the best way?



Letters a to h describe different teaching or learning situations that involve vocabulary. Decide which of the following approaches is the most suitable, and circle the correct letter.

Approaches

T = teacher fronted explanation or elicitation

S = student-centred task

C = use the context to work out the meaning

Teaching / Learning Situations for vocabulary	Approaches
a. 2 new words before a speaking activity.	T S C
b. 4 words in a reading text that are not important for an understanding of the text.	T S C
c. 8 words from a listening text that are important to an understanding of the text.	T S C
d. A set of about 10 words based around a topic or theme (e.g. crime words).	T S C
e. A couple of words that crop up unexpectedly in the lesson.	T S C
f. 3 words that are included in a grammar practice activity.	T S C
g. A list of verbs and nouns that go together (collocation) e.g. nouns that go with 'make and 'do'.	T S C
h. 4 words that are specific to a particular kind of written language e.g. legal words.	T S C

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Key Skill

Your approach to teaching vocabulary will vary depending on the type of lesson you are teaching. Course books often use student-centred tasks before reading or listening texts. Using the context to work out meaning is often done after reading or listening tasks.

Task 3 – Teacher-fronted vocabulary teaching



A teacher fronted approach is often used when the main lesson aim is to clarify a lexical set of vocabulary. Letters a to f are steps in the procedure for eliciting a word. Numbers i to vi give a rationale for each step. Put the steps in their correct order in the table below, then find the rationale that matches each step.

Steps for eliciting a word

- a. Check that students understand the meaning of the word by asking a concept question.
- b. Write up the word on the white board and provide grammar information.
- c. Drill the word.
- d. Provide the word, if students do not know it
- e. Elicit the word
- f. Convey the meaning using a picture or an oral definition.

Rationale for each step

- i. Students need to learn the spelling and part of speech of the word.
- ii. It is easier for students to start with the concept rather than the word itself.
- iii. If the students clearly do not know the word, then the teacher has to give it.
- iv. This allows students to contribute the word if they know it.
- v. It is a good idea to ensure students are sure about the meaning of the word before you ask them to say it.
- vi. Because English spelling is often strange, it is better for students to learn the sound of the new word before they see how it is written.

Steps	Rationale

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Key Skill

There is often more than one way to convey the meaning of any given word. It's the teacher's job to choose the most effective method for each word.

Task 4 – Getting the meaning across



There are different ways that the teacher can convey the meaning of a word in order to try and elicit it. In the left-hand column below there are 8 words. Letters a to h describe different methods of getting the meaning of words across. Choose the best method for each word. 

Words	Methods
1. hop (v)	
2. viability (n)	
3. exhausted (adj)	
4. kiwifruit (n)	
5. bitter (adj)	
6. imitate (v)	
7. skyscraper (n)	
8. rarely (adv)	

Method for getting meaning across

- a. Showing students a physical object of some kind – sometimes called 'realia'.
- b. Doing a mime or action.
- c. Explaining the meaning by giving an oral definition of the word.
- d. Asking students to think about the opposite meaning of a word they already know.
- e. Using a cline or diagram.
- f. Using a picture of something.
- g. Telling a short, personal story to give an example of the meaning.
- h. Getting students to read a short written text that acts as a context for the word.

Thinking about your teaching ...

Try different approaches to teaching vocabulary in the classroom and note how your students respond to the different approaches. Try to evaluate each approach in terms of the clarity for students and their motivation to learn.

Note your conclusions in your *Teaching Log*.

Taking it to the classroom ...

Choose one of the approaches described in the tasks above that you are less familiar with. Try using this approach with your students and evaluate its effectiveness.

Want to find out more ... ?

On pages 226 to 236 of *Learning Teaching (2nd edition)* by Jim Scrivener (Macmillan 2005), there is reading on vocabulary (called 'lexis' in the text) and how to deal with it in the classroom.

On pages 229 to 234 of *The Practice of English Language Teaching (4th edition)* by Jeremy Harmer (Pearson 2007), there is further reading on introducing vocabulary.

See also section 4 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 4 c) Teaching vocabulary 2: Concept checking** (*recommended as a follow-up to this lesson, focusing on clarifying meaning of new lexis in more depth for learners*)

Answer Key



Task 2 – Feedback

- a) T
- b) C
- c) S
- d) S
- e) T
- f) T
- g) S
- h) C

Task 4 – Feedback

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

Task 3 – Feedback

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



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Do you feel that sometimes you should check that students have understood new vocabulary more systematically? Do you sometimes forget to ask concept questions? If that's the case, this lesson will give you some useful pointers for writing effective concept questions for vocabulary. It will also give you some practice. Before you complete this task, it may be helpful to have looked at *Teaching Vocabulary 1: Different approaches*.

Task 1 – Was matching enough?

Pat: "I did a reading lesson with my students the other day. There were some difficult words in the text, so I made a task where students had to match the words to the definitions. Students got one or two words wrong, but during feedback, they mostly had correct answers. However, when they came to read the text, they still had problems with the words in the task. I don't understand why."



Can you help Pat? Jot down your ideas / suggestions on a note pad, then check the answer key below.



Task 1 Feedback

Matching a new word to a definition will not always check students' understanding of that word in enough detail. Beyond the matching task, it is a good idea to use concept questions to make sure students have a firm grasp of the meaning.

Key Skill

Concept questions are questions that focus on the meaning of a new word or phrase, for example, all aspects of the definition, the level of formality and sometimes the context in which you can use a word. They help students to consider words in more depth.

Task 2 – Advice on concept questions



Numbers 1 to 8 show advice on concept questions. Decide whether you think the advice is good or bad, then give a reason for your decision.

Advice	Good or Bad?	Reason
1. “Do you understand?” is not an effective concept question and should be avoided.		
2. If you explain words in a lot of detail, it is often possible not to ask concept questions.		
3. Whenever possible it pays to prepare concept questions in advance.		
4. It’s not a good idea to use a dictionary when preparing concept questions as the definitions can be confusing.		
5. When students repeat the word back to you, it’s an indication that they have understood the meaning.		
6. Concept questions need to be simple and specific rather than being very general.		
7. It is efficient to check all meanings of a word at the same time.		
8. The answers to concept questions need to be as short as possible.		

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Key Skill

Concept questions need to be clear and easy for students to understand. They should have short, simple answers. It pays to check just one concept at a time. Good concept questions are difficult to think of on the spot so it’s a good idea to prepare your questions in advance.

Task 3 – Relevant concept questions



Below are 8 words, each is followed by 4 concept questions and their anticipated answers in brackets. One of the concept questions in each set of 4 is not really relevant or necessary to checking the meaning of the word. Decide which concept question can be deleted from each set.

Words and concept questions

1. fade (adj)

- a) If something fades, does it become more or less clear? (less clear)
- b) Does this usually happen quickly or slowly? (usually slowly)
- c) Can colours in clothes fade? (yes)
- d) Do clothes designers like colours that fade? (not usually)

2. shuffle (v)

- a) Is this a way of walking? (yes)
- b) Do you wear special shoes when you shuffle? (no)
- c) Do you walk quickly or slowly? (slowly)
- d) Do you lift your feet when you shuffle? (no)

3. make off (phr v.)

- a) Do you leave quickly or slowly? (quickly)
- b) Is it because you did something wrong? (yes)
- c) Did you have another appointment to go to? (no)
- d) Did you do something wrong before or after leaving? (before)

4. critique (n)

- a) Do you give your opinion? (yes)
- b) Do you write your opinion down? (not necessarily)
- c) Is your opinion always negative? (no)
- d) Is this a more formal word? (yes)

5. despondent (adj)

- a) Do you feel happy or unhappy? (unhappy)
- b) Does your present situation make you feel unhappy? (yes)
- c) Do you think the situation will improve? (no)
- d) Are you worried about money? (perhaps)

6. stand off (n)

- a) Is a stand off between 2 people or 2 groups of people (could be either)
- b) Do people stand up when they disagree? (not always)
- c) Do people sometimes have a fight before a stand off? (yes)
- d) Can either person do anything to win? (no)

7. incoherent (adj)

- a) Did the writer think about the text carefully before writing it? (probably not)
- b) Is the text well written? (no)
- c) Is it easy to understand? (no)
- d) Is it badly organised (yes)

8. mope (v)

- a) Do you feel bored and perhaps unhappy? (yes)
- b) Do you show that you are interested in things? (no)
- c) Do you want to do things when you mope? (no)
- d) Do dogs mope? (they could)

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Key Skill

It is important to focus on core meaning of words when writing concept questions and not introduce unnecessary questions that could confuse students. Using examples of how the word is used can be useful, but the examples do need to be relevant to the context in which the word is being presented.

Task 4 – Writing concept questions



Write concept questions and answers for the vocabulary items a – h below. For each item no more than four concept questions.

Vocabulary items

- a. embarrassed (adj)
- b. put up with (v)
- c. barracks (n)
- d. justify (v)
- e. substitute (n)
- f. mercenary (adj)
- g. reclaim (v)
- h. let the side down (idiom)

The feedback provides *suggested* answers and variation is possible. 

Thinking about your teaching ...

It is interesting to work out whether concept checking leads to passive recognition only or productive use of new vocabulary items. Try teaching 5 or 6 words then an hour or so later, see if students can remember the meanings when they encounter those words in a text. A few days later, teach a different set of words and then an hour later give them a gap fill task in which students need to be able to use these words (e.g. a gapped text). Which is easier for students?

Note your conclusions in your *Teaching Log*.

Taking it to the classroom ...

With students from intermediate level upwards, it could be an interesting exercise to get them to teach each other vocabulary and use concept questions. You will need to provide them with mono-lingual dictionaries and allow them plenty of time. However, it means that students will deal with the meaning of the words they teach in a lot of detail.

Want to find out more ... ?

On pages 246 - 251 of *Learning Teaching (2nd edition)* by Jim Scrivener (Macmillan 2005), there is further reading on dealing with the meaning of new vocabulary and the full extent to which this needs to be considered. This will help in the writing of concept questions.

See also section 4 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 4 b) Vocabulary 1: Different Approaches**
(recommended as a precursor to this lesson)
- **Unit 4 g) Teaching Grammar 4: Concept-checking grammar**
(looks at how to check meaning of grammar with learners by using oral concept questions)

Answer Key



Task 2 – Feedback

1. Good advice.

Reason: *Students will usually answer this question with the word ‘yes’ in order to save face or avoid any further complications even if they don’t understand the word.*

2. Bad advice.

Reason: *Students will often not understand the detailed explanation, so there is no guarantee that this will make things clearer for learners. Detailed explanations do not check understanding of new language.*

3. Good advice.

Reason: *Concept questions are not always straight-forward and easy to create. If you know you have got new vocabulary items in a lesson, then it makes sense to prepare concept questions for these words in advance. It makes life easier in the classroom. Clearly, it is not possible to pre-prepare for words that crop up in a lesson. You need to do those spontaneously as well as you possibly can.*

4. Bad advice.

Reason: *Dictionaries are really useful tools when preparing concept questions because they help you see all aspects of a definition that need to be checked.*

5. Bad advice.

Reason: *This involves repetition of the sound of the word and is not an indication that students know what the word means.*

6. Good advice.

Reason: *The language of the question needs to be easy for students to understand and it pays to focus on the specific meaning of a word in one particular context.*

7. Bad advice.

Reason: *This is likely to confuse the students and it pays to check one meaning at a time.*

8. Good advice.

Reason: *They should be words or phrases that students can say quickly and easily. Long-winded answers are difficult for students to formulate, even when they do understand the meaning of the word.*

Task 3 – Feedback

- 1) d
- 2) b
- 3) c
- 4) b
- 5) d
- 6) b
- 7) a
- 8) d

Task 4 – Feedback

a. embarrassed (adj)

question 1: Is this a good feeling? (no)

question 2: Are you worried about what other people will think? (yes)

question 3: Does your face sometimes go red? (yes)

b. put up with (v)

question 1: Do you 'put up with' with a thing or a person or both? (both)

question 2: Do you like this thing or person (no)

question 3: Do you accept the thing or person (yes)

question 4: Are you patient or impatient? (patient)

c. barracks (n)

question 1: Are 'barracks' one building or a group of buildings? (a group of buildings)

question 2: Who lives in 'barracks'? (soldiers, people from armed forces)

question 3: Do they work there too? (yes)

d. justify (v)

question 1: If you 'justify' something, do you think some people have the wrong idea about that thing? (yes)

question 2: Do you believe there is a good reason why your idea is better? (yes)

question 3: Do you say or do something directly or indirectly? (directly)

question 4: Do you use examples? (possibly)

e. substitute (n)

question 1: If you need a 'substitute', can you use what you normally use? (no)

question 2: Do you use something new and different? (yes)

question 3: Is it the same as the original? (no)

question 4: Can a person be a substitute as well as a thing ? (yes)

f. mercenary (adj)

question 1: Does this word describe people or things? (people)

question 2: Do 'mercenary' people have a positive attitude? (no)

question 3: Are they interested in money they can get? (yes very)

question 4: Do they also want other advantages for themselves from a situation? (yes)

g. reclaim (v)

question 1: Did someone take something from you in the past? (yes)

question 2: When you 'reclaim' some thing, do you want to get it back? (yes)

question 3: Can you 'reclaim' something that someone borrowed? (yes)

question 4: Can you reclaim land? (yes)

h. let the side down (idiom)

question 1: Do we say this about people or things or both? (both, but most often people)

question 2: If you 'let the side down', do you work less hard and make mistakes? (yes)

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question 3: Does this affect other people? (yes)

question 4: Do we use this more in speaking than writing? (yes)



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Do you sometimes feel you teach grammar in the same old way? This lesson will give you some ideas for new ways to deal with grammar in the classroom.

Task 1 – Jessica’s Lesson

Jessica spent a lot of time preparing a grammar lesson on how to use articles (definite, indefinite and zero) with her intermediate level students. She used a variety of sentences that provided examples of different rules and explained these to students. They then completed some gap-fill sentences, which they all got correct. A few days later, Jessica collected in some essays from her students. This work contained a lot of mistakes, particularly mistakes in the way her students used articles. Jessica felt a bit frustrated because her carefully prepared lesson hadn’t seemed to be of any use.



How could you help Jessica? What do you think was wrong with her lesson? Jot down your ideas on a note pad, then check the answer key. 🗝️



Task 1 Feedback

First of all, it should be noted that teaching the article system in English can be very complicated and Jessica’s expectations might be a little unrealistic. However, it is also worth noting that Jessica used sentence level examples when she taught the lesson, but then found that students had problems using articles correctly in continuous texts. This suggests that Jessica perhaps needed to use extended texts and not just sentences as her context for teaching articles. This context is a closer match to how she expects students to be able to use articles correctly.

Key Skill

There are many different ways of teaching grammar. No one individual method suits all grammar points and all students. It is good to vary your approach to teaching grammar as it gives your students more variety and is likely to cater for different learning styles.

Task 2 – What contexts can you teach grammar from?



Numbers 1 – 4 are descriptions of four different ways of giving students examples of grammar points. Letters a – d describe the benefits of these different sources, while numbers i – iv mention possible drawbacks. Match the benefits and the drawbacks to their sources.

Sources of Grammar	Benefits	Drawbacks
1. Using texts as a source for a grammar point.		
2. Using examples of (in)correct student language produced during a speaking activity.		
3. Using examples that arise from a context (e.g. a picture story) together with students.		
4. Using sentences that are examples of the grammar point.		

Benefits

- a. A freer practice activity will tell you how well students know the grammar point and provide you with many examples of their language that you can use to correct and clarify the grammar.
- b. These are easy to create and are often simple and clear for students.
- c. Often these situations can involve pictures and this helps students with a visual learning style. The stories you can create can also be entertaining.
- d. Using reading or listening as a basis for clarifying a grammar point should provide you with plenty of examples.

Drawbacks

- i. It can be hard finding a situation that generates the language naturally and easily.
- ii. You need to be sure that what you use is either authentic or close to natural authentic language.
- iii. This approach can mean that the context is not rich enough and the isolation of examples can make some grammar rules difficult to understand.
- iv. The context of the activity needs to be communicative to be sure that it allows students to speak and produce a lot of language examples.

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Key Skill

A key consideration for all approaches is that the examples come from a context that is as authentic and as communicative as possible. In other words, try and avoid examples and contexts that native speakers themselves would not use.

Task 3 – Which approach can you use?



Numbers 1 and 2 are two approaches to clarifying a grammar point: an inductive versus a deductive approach. Letters a and b are definitions of these approaches, while i to vi are examples of these approaches. Match the definitions and the examples to the correct approach.

Two Approaches	Definitions	Examples
1. Inductive approach.		
2. Deductive approach.		

Definitions

- a. The teacher gives the rules of the grammar point.
- b. The student works out the rules of the grammar point.

Examples

- i. The teacher asks oral questions that check students' understanding of the meaning of the grammar point and its form.
- ii. The teacher provides students with written examples of their errors together with some questions that get students to correct the errors and work out the meaning and the form of the grammar point.
- iii. The teacher provides a translation of the grammar point into the students' first language. This is only possible in a monolingual situation.
- iv. The teacher asks students to read some grammar reference materials in order to understand the meaning and form of the grammar point.
- v. The teacher provides the students with a written task that guides students to understanding the meaning and the form of the grammar point.
- vi. The teachers gives an oral explanation of the meaning and the form of the grammar point.

Check your ideas in the answer key.



Key Skill

Whether you use one approach or another will depend on your students' learning style, their needs, the nature of the language point itself and the need for variety in a language programme. Current methodology has a preference for a more inductive / guided discovery approach as it tends to be more student-centred.

Task 4 – Evaluating approaches



Below are a series of statements that highlight the strengths of both the inductive and the deductive approaches to clarifying a grammar point with students. Read the statements and decide which approach they are talking about. Write 'I' for inductive (student works out the rules) and 'D' for deductive (teacher gives the rules).

Strengths	I or D?
a. It can give students a sense of security.	
b. It encourages the students to refer more often to the context of the grammar point.	
c. Students can learn at their own rate, rather than that of the class.	
d. The teacher can get straight to the point.	
e. It is more student-centred.	
f. It allows the students to take a more gradual step-by-step approach to different aspects of the grammar point.	
g. It suits students who have a strongly accuracy-focused learning style.	
h. It gives students time to think about the grammar point.	
i. It can mean that students get extra speaking practice when they discuss the grammar with each other or with their teacher.	
j. It gives the teacher a clear sense of having taught something.	
k. It can help make students more independent in their learning.	
l. It means a bit more mental effort for students and this can have the result that they engage more fully with the language.	

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Thinking about your teaching ...

Over the next few weeks, make a note of different ways you use to teach a grammar point. After each lesson, think about how successful it was from the students' point of view. You could ask them to give you feedback on the approach.

Make a note of this record in your *Teaching Log* and decide whether you need to vary your approach to teaching grammar.

Taking it to the classroom ...

Try experimenting with a new approach to teaching grammar with your students. If you need to read up on a different approach in more detail see *Want to find out more ...?* below. Aim to build up an extensive repertoire of approaches to teaching grammar.

Want to find out more ... ?

Chapters 3 and 4 of *How To Teach Grammar* by Scott Thornbury (Longman Pearson 1999) contain clear practical examples of different approaches to teaching grammar that you can try out.

See also section 6 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 the teaching of grammar:

- **Unit 4 e) Teaching Grammar 2: Grammar from texts**
(*outlines a procedure for a text-based approach to grammar lessons*)
- **Unit 4 f) Teaching Grammar 3: Using communicative activities**
(*looks at how to use communicative activities to focus on grammar*)
- **Unit 4 g) Teaching Grammar 4: Concept-checking grammar**
(*looks at how to check meaning of grammar with learners by using oral concept questions*)

Answer Key



Task 2 – Feedback

- 1) d and ii
- 2) a and iv
- 3) c and i
- 4) b and iii

Task 3 – Feedback

- 1) b - i, ii and v
- 2) a - iii, iv and vi

Task 4 – Feedback

- a) D
- b) I
- c) I
- d) D
- e) I
- f) I
- g) D
- h) I
- i) I
- j) D
- k) I
- l) I



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How easy do you find it to teach grammar from texts? Do you feel that your lessons sometimes get bogged down by the course book material? This lesson outlines a procedure that may help motivate your students in text-based grammar lessons.

Task 1 – Andy’s frustration

Andy: “I was teaching the past perfect the other day. I found this really good reading text full of lots of examples. I pointed out the examples and then explained the use of the past perfect. I asked students if they had understood my explanation and they all said they did. However, when I gave them a practice activity to do, very few of them could use the past perfect correctly. It was very frustrating. I felt like I’d been wasting my time.”



Can you help Andy? Think of possible reasons why Andy’s students didn’t understand. Jot down your answers on a note pad, then check the answer key below. 

Task 1 Feedback

It is possible that Andy’s approach to teaching his grammar point didn’t motivate his students. His explanation could have been quite long-winded and perhaps students didn’t understand. When he asked students if they understood the grammar, they may have said “yes” to save face, when in fact they didn’t really understand.

Key Skill

When teaching grammar from text, it is a good idea to engage learners as much as possible by getting them to discover the language and think about what it *means*, how it is *used* and how it is *formed*. Teacher explanations can often be ineffective at doing this because the teacher talks too much and the learners switch off.

Task 2 – Steps in a text-based grammar lesson



Letters a to f outline key steps in a text-based grammar lesson. Numbers i to vi are aims that match each stage. Put the steps in their correct order into the table below, then find the aim that matches each step.

Steps
a. Students check the form of the target grammar.
b. Students highlight the target grammar in the text.
c. The teacher provides controlled to freer practice of the target grammar.
d. Students read (or listen to) the text that contains the target grammar.
e. The teacher highlights the pronunciation of the target grammar (if it is typically used for oral communication).
f. Students check the meaning of the target grammar .

Aims
i. To focus students on the grammar that is to be clarified.
ii. To provide opportunities for the students to use the new language in a variety of contexts.
iii. To check students' understanding of the context that the target grammar comes from.
iv. To give very controlled oral practice of phonological features of the grammar.
v. To ensure students understand concepts associated with the grammar (e.g. time reference, intention etc.) and the way it is used in native speaker language.
vi. To ensure students understand the component parts of the grammar and how it is put together.

Steps	Aims
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Key Skill

It is important that students understand the context of the target grammar because this will help them understand the meaning. It is better to study the *meaning* of the grammar before looking at the *form* because examining how something is made without understanding what it means can be frustrating.

Task 3 – How to achieve the aims



Numbers 1 to 6 below repeat the stages in a text-based grammar lesson. However, this time they are in the correct order. Letters a to f describe activities for each stage. They are in a different order. Match the activities to the stages.

Stages	Activities
1. Students read (or listen to) the text that contain the target grammar.	
2. Students highlight the target grammar in the text.	
3. Students check the meaning of the target grammar.	
4. Students check the form of the target grammar.	
5. The teacher highlights the pronunciation of the target grammar (if it is typically used for oral communication).	
6. The teacher provides controlled to freer practice of the target grammar.	

Activities

- a.** The teacher provides an oral model of the target grammar point and then drills students chorally and individually.
- b.** The teacher gives comprehension questions that check the information in the text.
- c.** The teacher elicits information about how the target grammar is made using the white board. Alternatively, students can work on a student-centred task.
- d.** The teacher sets up a variety of activities, both spoken and written, that allow students to use the target grammar.
- e.** Students are asked to underline examples of the target grammar or the teacher might point them out. If using a listening text, you can isolate examples of the target grammar on the tape.
- f.** The teacher gives learners a student-centred task that guides them towards an understanding of the use of the target grammar. The task might include questions, or clines, or grids. An alternative is for the teacher to ask oral concept questions about the target grammar.

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Key Skill

Whenever possible, it is worth considering providing a student-centred task to clarify key aspects of grammar: meaning and form. These tasks should guide students to an understanding of the target grammar and should mean the teacher does not need to use long-winded explanation.

Task 4 – Evaluating text-based grammar lessons



Decide if the following statements are a correct or an incorrect evaluation of text-based grammar lessons. Write 'C' for correct and 'I' for incorrect in the right-hand column of the table.

Statements	C or I?
1. Text-based grammar lessons allow you to focus on all uses of a particular grammar point.	
2. Text-based grammar lessons follow a guided discovery approach and students are able to find out about the language themselves.	
3. The use of texts means that students can see examples of target grammar points in context.	
4. When planning text-based grammar lessons, teachers should create as many of their own texts as possible.	
5. Text-based grammar lessons are likely to appeal to students who like a clearly structured approach to learning grammar.	
6. Student-centred meaning and form tasks give students useful thinking time and allow them to process information about the language.	
7. The lack of teacher explanation might mean that some students switch off or get distracted.	
8. The approach is suited to working with course books as they often present new language in texts.	
9. The fact that the language is presented in a reading text means you shouldn't drill it.	
10. A text-based approach may help some students to think about texts they find outside the classroom as a source of grammar.	

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Thinking about your teaching ...

How does a text-based approach to teaching grammar compare with other approaches you have used? Consider the pluses and minuses of this approach from the teacher's point view.

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 in 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 group discussion as they negotiate.

Want to find out more ... ?

Chapter 5 of *How To Teach Grammar* by Scott Thornbury (Longman Pearson 1999) contains further ideas on how to teach grammar by using texts.

Related TaskBook lessons...

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

- **Unit 4 d) Teaching Grammar 1: Different approaches**
(looks at a variety of approaches to teaching grammar)
- **Unit 4 f) Teaching Grammar 3: Using communicative activities**
(looks at how to use communicative activities to focus on grammar)
- **Unit 4 g) Teaching Grammar 4: Concept-checking grammar**
(looks at how to check meaning of grammar with learners by using oral concept questions)

Answer Key



Task 2 – Feedback

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

Task 3 – Feedback

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

Task 4 – Feedback

1. Incorrect

Comment: Usually texts will focus on only one use of a grammar point. Texts that try to include a large variety of uses can seem contrived and unnatural.

2. Correct

Comment: It is the design of the tasks that 'guides' students to an understanding of the target grammar point.

3. Correct

Comment: This is a key strength of this approach.

4. Incorrect

Comment: It is far easier to use texts in published materials or authentic texts.

5. Correct

Comment: It gives students the feeling that they are working through a step-by-step process. Other more communicative learners might get frustrated by too much of this.

6. Correct

Comment: As a result of this thinking time, students often have questions. The teacher can deal with these questions during monitoring, when students are working on the meaning and form tasks.

7. Incorrect

Comment: The reverse is more likely to be true.

8. Correct

Comment: Some course books will also provide meaning and form tasks that you can use.

9. Incorrect

Comment: Whether you drill or not should depend on whether the target language is typically used in oral communication by native speakers.

10. Correct

Comment: But the teacher may need to point this out to students.



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Do you sometimes feel that you are teaching students grammar they already know? This lesson looks at how you can use communication activities as a springboard to focusing on grammar. It examines the aims and stages of such a lesson and looks at issues and options surrounding this approach to teaching grammar.

Task 1 – What your students say and do



Below are five statements about what students sometimes say and do. Are any true for you?

1. Students often complain that they know all the grammar, but they are still incorrect when they speak.
2. Students often don't see the relevance of learning grammar.
3. Students say they want more feedback on the language they produce.
4. Students say they want to do more speaking in your classes.
5. Students can often do very controlled oral practice activities correctly. However, when they are given a freer practice activity, they will often get the target grammar wrong.

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



Task 1 Feedback

If only one of these statements is true for your current teaching situation, then using communication activities for teaching grammar could be a useful skill to learn. If none of the statements are true, then your students must be extremely happy – well done! The following lesson may still be of use to you all the same.

Key Skill

Using communication activities to teach grammar can offer variety to your students and cater to the needs of learners who are keen to develop their ability to use English. It also provides opportunities for teachers to give systematic feedback on students' errors.

Task 2 – What are the different steps?



Letters a to e outline key stages in a lesson that teaches grammar by means of a communicative activity. Numbers i to v are aims that match each stage. Put the steps in their correct order in the table below, then match the correct aim to each step.

Stages

- a. Teacher-led error correction of student language.
- b. Students do a second communication activity.
- c. Teacher evaluation of student language.
- d. Students do a communication activity that requires use of a specific grammar point.
- e. Checking of meaning and form by teacher.

Aims

- i. To determine whether students are able to use the target language point and to listen for their accuracy with other language.
- ii. To clarify how the target language point is used and made.
- iii. To provide an initial opportunity for students to use the target grammar point and to provide speaking practice.
- iv. To provide students with an opportunity to further practise and consolidate the target language point.
- v. To give students feedback on the language they produced and to focus on the target grammar point.

Stages	Aims
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Key Skill

The point of departure of this lesson is a communication task that involves speaking. This gives teachers an opportunity to hear if students can use the target grammar point. If students are using the language perfectly well, the teacher should give feedback on other errors and not worry about checking the meaning and form of the target grammar point. If students can use this language, they clearly don't need any more work on it.

Task 3 – How to achieve the aims



Numbers 1 to 5 below repeat the stages of a lesson that teaches grammar by means of a communication activity. However, this time they are in the correct order. Letters a to e describe activities for each stage. They are in a different order. Match the activities to the stages.

Stages	Activities
1. Students do a communication activity that requires use of a specific grammar point.	
2. Teacher evaluation of student language.	
3. Teacher-led error correction of student language.	
4. Checking of meaning and form by teacher.	
5. Students do a second communication activity.	

Activities

- a. The teacher writes up the collected errors on the white board. Corrections can either be elicited from learners, or students can be put in pairs or small groups to correct the language and conduct feedback.
- b. The teacher gives students another communication activity that practises the target language point and asks them to do this activity and concentrate on using the target grammar point correctly. Alternatively, students could re-do the original activity.
- c. Having elicited corrections of student language, the teacher uses oral concept questions to check the meaning of the target grammar point, afterwards checking the form by eliciting it and then writing it up on the white board.
- d. The teacher monitors and listens carefully to the language that students are producing, particularly for the target grammar point, or its absence and finds out what incorrect forms students are using in its place. The teacher also notes other examples of incorrect language, noting these down on a piece of paper.
- e. The teacher sets up the communication activity, but makes a point of not mentioning the target grammar point nor asking that students use it.

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Key Skill

In terms of the focus on grammar, stages 3 and 4 are key in this approach. They may not always be completely separate stages. When eliciting the correct version of the white board language, the teacher might check meaning and form at the same time. A variation for the third stage is to put up a mixture of correct and incorrect examples of the target language and get students to decide which versions are the correct ones.

Task 4 – Strengths and challenges



The following statements are about different aspects of lessons that teach grammar from a communicative activity. Some of them indicate strengths of this approach, while others describe challenges. Sort them into the appropriate categories below.

Strengths				Challenges			

Statements

1. This approach heightens the relevance of the target grammar point during the meaning and form stages. If students have had problems with the point, they can see the need to clarify it. They are less likely to complain about having studied the point already.
2. It creates a very natural connection between speaking and communication and grammar, rather than viewing these as separate entities.
3. The teacher needs to listen very carefully when monitoring. This may be a little difficult because of the noise level in the classroom and quietly spoken students may be harder to hear.
4. The teacher needs to be able to respond to unexpected language issues that can arise. These issues may not be connected with the target language point.
5. There is the opportunity to cover more grammar in a lesson. Apart from the target grammar point, the teacher can also deal with other points that arise during the correction stage.
6. If the students do the first activity well and produce the target language, the teacher needs to have an alternative activity ready to use in place of the meaning and form stages.
7. Because the lesson involves a lot of speaking, some students may not feel they are learning grammar in a concrete and tangible way. The teacher may need to point out to them that the error feedback and meaning and form stages do involve an explicit focus on grammar.
8. This approach means that students are getting consistent feedback on the language that they produce. This is likely to appeal to learners who want more error correction from their teacher.

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Thinking about your teaching ...

Think about this approach to teaching grammar from the students' point of view. Imagine you are learning a second language and being taught grammar using this approach. What aspects of the approach would you find frustrating, what other aspects would you enjoy? Make a list and then work out whether you would experiment with slight alterations to the approach described above.

Note your conclusions in your *Teaching Log*.

Taking it to the classroom ...

Often this approach does not match published teaching materials. The grammar clarification materials might use texts or examples. However, these books often include communication activities that aim to practise grammar points. These are often placed towards the end of a lesson, or at the back of the book. Teachers can use these as their point of departure for teaching grammar, in line with the approach outlined in this lesson.

Want to find out more ... ?

Chapter 7 of *How To Teach Grammar* by Scott Thornbury (Longman Pearson 1999) contains further ideas on using students' errors to teach grammar.

Related TaskBook lessons...

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- **Unit 4 g) Teaching Grammar 4: Concept-checking grammar**
(looks at how to check meaning of grammar with learners by using oral concept questions)

Answer Key



Task 2 – Feedback

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

Task 4 – Feedback

Strengths = 1, 2, 5, 8
Challenges = 3, 4, 6, 7

Task 3 – Feedback

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



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How can you know if students have understood the meaning of grammar during a lesson? Is asking them if they understand enough? This lesson gives you ideas on how to check grammatical meaning effectively by using clearly focused oral questions.

Task 1 – Susannah’s explanation

Susannah: “I was teaching the difference between the past simple and the past perfect. I explained as clearly as I could and did lots of examples with them on the white board. They were nodding their heads in agreement and it seemed like they were getting it. Then I gave them this practice activity – a text gap fill – and they got everything wrong. At that point, a few students admitted that they hadn’t really understood the grammar.”



How could Susannah have checked students’ understanding more thoroughly before students beginning the practice activity? Jot down your ideas on a note pad, then check the answer key below. 🗝️



Task 1 Feedback

Susannah’s approach is to give an explanation and look and see if students have understood. She may also have asked students directly if they had understood the difference in meaning between the two verb forms. However, for a teacher to make sure that students have genuinely understood, they need to ask more searching questions that focus explicitly on grammatical meaning.

Key Skill

Oral concept questions that focus on grammatical meaning are an effective way of checking students’ understanding of new grammar items. They aim to ‘unpack’ the core concepts associated with grammar structures in such a way that students can gradually develop a deeper understand of grammatical meaning.

Task 2 – Some core concepts



Numbers 1 to 8 outline some core concepts associated with different verb forms in English. Letters a to h give the names of these verb phrases, with an example sentence. Match the concepts to the verb phrases.

Core concepts of verb forms	Verb phrases
1. time reference	
2. degrees of obligation	
3. relationship between actions and periods of time	
4. intention	
5. degrees of possibility	
6. identifying the 'agent' (or 'do-er') of an action	
7. duration	
8. reality versus hypothetically	

Names of verb phrases & example sentences

- a. modal auxiliary verbs may, might etc. e.g. *It looks like it might rain tomorrow.*
- b. future forms e.g. *We're going to meet up with them after dinner.*
- c. present and past tenses e.g. *He left school five years ago.*
- d. conditional structures e.g. *If I were the Prime Minister, I'd pay more attention to ecology.*
- e. passive forms e.g. *The book was written by an unknown writer.*
- f. perfect verb forms e.g. *I've had this car for about three years now.*
- g. modal auxiliary verbs must, should etc. e.g. *You should really see a doctor.*
- h. continuous (or progressive) verb forms e.g. *I was waiting at the bus stop when he drove by.*

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Key Skill

Grammar concept questions focus on key ideas of grammatical meaning. Some grammar forms have different uses and when checking grammatical meaning you should check only one use at a time. Normally this will be related to the context you have used to teach the grammar.

Task 3 – Which questions?



Numbers 1 to 5 are example structures from the previous task. Letters a to o are concept questions (and answers) that relate only to the underlined grammar structures in the example sentences. Each structure needs 3 concept questions.

- a) Match the concept questions (and answers) to the example structures.
- b) Put the concept questions in the best order.

Example structures	Concept questions
1. I've <u>had</u> this car for about three years now.	
2. We're <u>going to</u> meet up with them after dinner.	
3. I <u>was waiting</u> at the bus stop when he drove by.	
4. You <u>should</u> really see a doctor.	
5. It looks like it <u>might</u> rain tomorrow.	

Concept questions with answers (in brackets)

- a. Did you decide to do this before speaking or when you were speaking? (before)
- b. Is it only a possibility? (yes)
- c. Do you want the other person to do this? (yes)
- d. When did you buy it? (3 years ago)
- e. Did the action happen in the past? (yes)
- f. Is the speaker talking about now or the future? (now)
- g. Did you own it all that time? (yes)
- h. Is the action in the present or the future? (future)
- i. Did it begin before or after the second action? (before)
- j. Will it definitely happen? (no)
- k. Do you think this is a good idea? (yes)
- l. Do you still have it? (yes)
- m. Did it continue after the second action? (yes)
- n. Is the speaker sure about the action? (yes)
- o. Do you feel very strongly that the other person do this? (no)

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Key Skill

Most structures need at least 3 questions in order to pinpoint the concept. More complex structures may need more than 3 questions. The language should be simple and avoid as much grammar terminology as possible. When you write a concept question, you should also write what answer you expect students to give you.

Task 4 – Writing concept questions



Below are 5 sentences with underlined grammar structures. Write concept questions and their answers for each structure. Write a *maximum* of three questions for each structure. Jot down your answers on a note pad. The feedback provides *suggested* answers and variation is possible.

Sentences

- a. I'm sorry but I've lost my student card. Can I get another one?
- b. When I was a child, I used to play the piano.
- c. He's working part-time at the moment and won't be here until later.
- d. I wish I had an iPod.
- e. It can't be John at the door – he's gone overseas.

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Thinking about your teaching ...

Some grammatical concepts will be more difficult to check for some students than others. The students' first language may play a role in the degree of challenge they find with some concepts, or your questions may be too difficult. Make a note of any concepts students seemed to find very challenging. Discuss this with your colleagues and see if they have had similar problems. If you fear that your concept questions are too difficult, give them to a colleague to review and see if they can make suggestions to make them easier to understand.

Taking it to the classroom ...

When concept checking structures that you think your students will find particularly difficult, you could try giving them written concept questions that they can think about and discuss the answers to in pairs, followed by feedback. This will give students a bit more thinking time.

Want to find out more ... ?

On pages 219 - 221 of *Learning Teaching (2nd Edition)* by Jim Scrivener (Macmillan 2005), there is further reading on concept questions for grammar.

See also section 6 of *Language Teaching Classroom Practice DVD & Workbook* by Heather Richards and Karen Wise (AUT University 2007).

Related TaskBook lessons...

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(looks at a variety of approaches to teaching grammar)
- **Unit 4 e) Teaching Grammar 2: Grammar from texts**
(outlines a procedure for a text-based approach to grammar lessons)
- **Unit 4 f) Teaching Grammar 3: Grammar through communicative activities**
(looks at how to use communicative activities to focus on grammar)

Answer Key



Task 2 – Feedback

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

Task 3 – Feedback

- 1) d, l and g
- 2) h, a and n
- 3) e, i and m
- 4) k, c and o
- 5) f, j and b

Task 4 – Feedback

a. I'm sorry but I've lost my student card. Can I get another one?

question 1. *Did you lose the card in the past or the present? (the past)*

question 2. *Do we know exactly when? (no)*

question 3. *Is the result in the present? (yes)*

b. When I was a child, I used to play the piano.

question 1. *Are you talking about the past or the present? (the past)*

question 2. *Did you play piano once or often? (often)*

question 3. *Do you play the piano now? (probably not)*

c. He's working part-time at the moment and won't be here until later.

question 1. *Does he usually work part-time? (no)*

question 2. *Is working part-time something temporary? (no)*

question 3. *Is he working as we speak? (no)*

d. I wish I had an iPod.

question 1. *Do you want an iPod? (yes)*

question 2. *Do you want it very much? (yes)*

question 3. *Do you want it now or did you want it in the past? (now)*

e. It can't be John at the door – he's gone overseas.

question 1. *Is the speaker talking about now or the future? (now)*

question 2. *Is the speaker certain or does he think it's a possibility? (certain)*

question 3. *Is he 100% certain or more like 95%? (more like 95%)*



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Do you sometimes feel like you need to teach more language that is relevant to your students' needs? This lesson helps you do this by exploring an approach to learning language through tasks.

Task 1 – Alison's doubts.

Alison is a little unsure about how task-based learning works. Here are 3 questions that she has:

Question 1: What exactly is task-based learning?

Question 2: Can you focus on grammar in a task-based lesson?

Question 3: Is it true that the way students learn is by just picking up language from each other?



Can you answer any of these questions for Alison?

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

Task 1 Feedback

Question 1: What exactly is task-based learning?

Answer: *In general, it is an approach to English- language learning in which students learn by doing tasks. However, it is not as straightforward as just doing one task after another.*

Question 2: Can you focus on grammar in a task-based lesson?

Answer: *Yes, you can. The way that you do so is a little different from other approaches, but it is fine to focus on grammar in task-based lessons.*

Question 3: Is it true that the way students learn is by just picking up language from each other?

Answer: *This is one way in which students can learn when working on tasks. However, task-based learning also involves other learning opportunities for students.*

Key skill

Task-based learning provides an alternative approach to focusing on language. It has the key benefit of allowing students some degree of choice in terms of what language they learn while working on tasks. However, it does not mean that grammar and vocabulary are totally ignored.

Task 2 – Who does what?



Numbers 1 to 6 show teacher activity during the stages of a typical task-based lesson. They are in the correct order. Letters a to f describe student activities during these stages. They are not in the correct order. Match the student activity to the teacher activity.

Teacher Activity	Student activity
1. Pre task: The teacher provides information or vocabulary that will help students with the task.	
2. Task: The teacher asks students to perform a task in pairs or small groups with some kind of tangible outcome.	
3. Reporting: The teacher asks each pair or group to prepare and give a report on the outcome of the task.	
4. Model: The teacher provides students with a model of proficient speakers performing the task.	
5. Language noticing: The teacher asks students to study language features in the proficient speaker model.	
6. Practice: The teacher provides students with activities that practise some of the language features in the proficient speaker model.	

Student activity

- a. Students speak or write or both – individually or in pairs.
- b. Students speak in groups and perhaps make notes, then one student speaks alone.
- c. Students read or listen or study new words.
- d. Students study the text.
- e. Students read or listen.
- f. Students speak together and perhaps do some writing or note taking.

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Key skill

The introduction of the proficient speaker model is an opportunity to focus on language. The general principle is that having done the task themselves, students are usually very interested in seeing how proficient speakers performed the task and what language they used.

Task 3 – What is the rationale for each step?



Numbers 1 to 6 are the correct stages for teacher activity, as in task 2. Letters a to f provide a commentary on each stage. However, they are not in the correct order. Match the commentary to the correct stages.

Stages of teacher activity	Commentary
1. Pre task: The teacher provides information or vocabulary that will help students with the task.	
2. Task: The teacher asks students to perform a task in pairs or small groups with some kind of tangible outcome.	
3. Reporting: The teacher asks each pair or group to prepare and give a report on the outcome of the task.	
4. Model: The teacher provides students with a model of proficient speakers performing the task.	
5. Language noticing: The teacher asks students to study language features in the proficient speaker model.	
6. Practice: The teacher provides students with activities that practise some of the language features in the proficient speaker model.	

Commentary

- a. This stage should ideally include some kind of problem-solving element that gives students a reason to speak.
- b. The teacher can provide a task during this stage that either focuses students' attention on a language point, or the teacher can let students choose what they want to focus on.
- c. This stage is often optional. It depends on what students have done in the previous stage.
- d. These materials shouldn't be too long or detailed or students will lose time before getting on to the following, key stage.
- e. This can either be a recording or a tape script or both.
- f. The teacher should avoid correcting students' language at this stage and focus on the content of what they have to say.



Key skill

Both the first and the last stage are optional. It depends on the nature of the task and the language that appears in the proficient speaker model. Teachers may take in a variety of practice activities for the final stage and let students decide which language point they want more practice in.

Check your ideas in the answer key.

Task 4 – How to prepare a task-based lesson (1)



Letters a to f are some suggested steps in how to plan and prepare a task-based lesson, but they are not in the correct order. Put the steps in the correct order.

Suggested steps for planning a task-based lesson	Order
a. Decide whether you will let students notice the language they want to or whether you will ask them to focus on specific vocabulary or grammar.	
b. Look for reading or listening texts that might be useful at the pre-task stage.	
c. Record a model of the task being done by proficient speakers.	
d. Find a task that has tangible outcomes.	
e. Transcribe the proficient speaker model (or part of it) and look for useful language points.	
f. If you have focused on a specific language point, look for some activities that will provide practice of that language.	

Check your ideas in the answer key.

Task 5 – How to prepare a task-based lesson (2)



Letters a to f are pieces of advice that match the planning steps from the previous task. Match the advice to each step in the planning process. 

Advice	Steps
a. Not only will this provide you with a useful language sample, it will also show you if there are any problems with the task design that need to be fixed before you give it to students.	
b. If there is a particular language point you want to draw students' attention to, your task can focus on any or all aspects of meaning and form associated with that language.	
c. It's best to do this first because this is the cornerstone to the whole approach.	
d. This is usually (but not always) the last step because it can be a useful extra activity rather than an essential one.	
e. These can be a mix of written and spoken tasks. One possibility is to ask students to repeat the original task in different groups.	
f. Your choice here is likely to depend on the language that you find in the proficient speaker model. If there is a language form that occurs consistently in the model, it makes sense to create a language noticing task that focuses on this language point.	

Planning steps

1. Find a task that has tangible outcomes.
2. Record a model of the task with proficient speakers.
3. Transcribe the proficient speaker model (or part of it) and look for useful language points.
4. Decide whether you will let students notice the language they want to or whether you will ask them to focus on specific vocabulary or grammar.
5. If you have focused on a specific language point, look for some activities that will provide practice of that language.
6. Look for reading or listening texts that might be useful at the pre-task stage.

Thinking about your teaching ...

In task-based lessons where students choose the language they wish to focus on, it is interesting to note which language items students want to study. Keep a note of the vocabulary and grammar points they choose and see if it tells you anything about your students' language development. For example, are these language points that students often produce incorrectly?

Note your observations in your *Teaching Log*.

Taking it to the classroom ...

Some learner groups may want you to give feedback on their language use after the reporting phase. Try lessons where you do this and try lessons where you don't. Then ask learners which approach they prefer.

Want to find out more ... ?

Pages 71 – 73 of *The Practice of English Language Teaching (4th edition)* by Jeremy Harmer (Pearson 2007) contain further reading on task-based learning.

Related TaskBook lessons...

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

- **Unit 4 d) Teaching Grammar 1: Different approaches**
(looks at a variety of approaches to teaching grammar)
- **Unit 4 e) Teaching Grammar 2: Grammar from texts**
(outlines a procedure for a text-based approach to grammar lessons)
- **Unit 4 f) Teaching Grammar 3: Grammar through communicative activities**
(looks at how to use communicative activities to focus on grammar)

Answer Key



Task 1 - Feedback

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Question 2: Can you focus on grammar in a task-based lesson?

Answer: Yes, you can. The way that you do so is a little different from other approaches, but it is fine to focus on grammar in task-based lessons.

Question 3: Is it true that the way students learn is by just picking up language from each other?

Answer: This is one way in which students can learn when working on tasks. However, task-based learning also involves other learning opportunities for students.

Task 2 – Feedback

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

Task 3 – Feedback

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

Task 4 – Feedback

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

Task 5 – Feedback

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



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Do you feel that your language lessons are overly focused on grammar and vocabulary? Do you find that students sometimes struggle to communicate effectively in some social situations? The answer may be to teach your students more functional language. This lesson outlines some common functions, their characteristics and ways of teaching them.

Task 1 – What’s the real meaning?



Look at the two-line dialogue below and the following exchange between the student and teacher.

John: I can hear the phone.

Sue: I’m having my lunch.

Student: Why does Sue say “I’m having my lunch”?

Teacher: Because she’s is doing it now – at the moment of speaking.

Student: But John is there – he can see she is having her lunch.

Teacher: Exactly. It’s happening now.

Student: But why?

What is the teacher not making clear?

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



Task 1 Feedback

The teacher is not focusing on the functional meaning of Sue’s utterance. In this context, Sue is making an excuse – “I’m not going to answer the phone because I’m having my lunch”. Focusing only on the grammatical meaning of the structure Sue uses does not make this clear.

Key Skill

Understanding the underlying social meaning of certain utterances is at the heart of functional language. We often use language because we want to perform some kind of communicative act like make a request or offer advice. The expressions that we use to achieve this are known as functional exponents.

Task 2 – Some typical functions



Numbers 1 to 10 list some common functions. Letters a to j provide examples of functional exponents (ways of expressing each function). Match the functions to the exponents.

Functions	
1. making suggestion	2. inviting
3. giving advice	4. requesting
5. making apologies	6. refusing
7. agreeing	8. regretting
9. offering	10. complaining

Exponents

- a. I can't make it tonight – sorry.
- b. I'm afraid I was disappointed by the service.
- c. I should have left earlier.
- d. We could order in a pizza.
- e. It'd pay to talk to the boss.
- f. I'd go along with that.
- g. I'm really sorry about the vase.
- h. Why don't you come over tonight?
- i. Any chance of a coffee?
- j. I'll pay.

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Key Skill

The examples in task 2 are not in any way comprehensive. There are many other functions in English, and there is a wide variety of exponents that can be used to express each one.



Numbers 1 to 5 below outline some key principles associated with functional language. Letters a to e describe the consequences of these principles in terms of classroom practice. Match the principles with the consequences

Principles

1. One structure can have more than one functional meaning ...
2. The kind of functional exponent that you use changes depending on how well you know the person that you are speaking to ...
3. Pronunciation, in particular sentence stress and intonation, has a key role to play in functional language ...
4. Functional exponents can often vary greatly in terms of their structure ...
5. Some functions can be indirect and subtle ...

Consequences

- a. ... so you sometimes need to highlight the grammatical form.
- b. ... so you need to check their meaning very thoroughly.
- c. ... so in the classroom it is important to establish the relationship between the speakers in examples and practice activities.
- d. ... so it is important that the teacher makes the context clear to students.
- e. ... so it is important to provide students with plenty of controlled oral practice.

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Key Skill

Many language structures have more than one meaning. The meaning of an utterance is often difficult to understand out of context. For students to understand the functional meaning of an utterance it is essential that both the context and the relationship between the speakers are made explicit to them.

Task 4 – Activities and aims



Numbers 1 to 8 describe different activities that can be used to teach aspects of functional language. Letters a to h are aims associated with these activities. Match the aims to the activities. 

Activities	Aims
1. The teacher plays a dialogue and asks students to think about where they think it is taking place.	
2. The teacher asks students to read a dialogue and decide on the relationship between the two speakers.	
3. The teacher asks students to read a series of short excerpts from dialogues and decide on possible meanings of certain utterances.	
4. The teacher underlines key words in examples on the white board.	
5. The teacher drills from prompts focusing on stress and intonation.	
6. The teacher uses prompts to elicit a four-line dialogue that exemplifies a functional exponent and gets students to practise it in pairs.	
7. The teacher asks students to rewrite a scrambled dialogue containing functional language so that it is in the correct order.	
8. The teacher asks students to perform a role play that offers an opportunity to use functional exponents.	

Aims

- a. To provide pronunciation practice.
- b. To highlight the form.
- c. To provide controlled written practice.
- d. To check language appropriateness.
- e. To provide freer oral practice.
- f. To check understanding of the context.
- g. To check functional meaning.
- h. To provide controlled oral practice.

Thinking about your teaching ...

Over a period of two or three weeks, listen to friends and colleagues and try and tune in to the way they use language. Listen for examples of functional language and think about how clear the meaning would be to a non-native speaker.

Note your observations in your *Teaching log*.

Taking it to the classroom ...

When focusing on dialogues that contain functional language, there are three useful questions that will help students to think about and analyse the target language:

- Where is the conversation taking place?
- What is the relationship between the speakers?
- What does speaker A / B want to do / say?

Want to find out more ... ?

On pages 221 to 225 of *Learning Teaching (2nd Edition)* by Jim Scrivener (Macmillan 2005) there is further reading on teaching functional language.

On pages 231 and 232 of *The Practice of English Language Teaching (4th Edition)* by Jeremy Harmer (Pearson 2007) there is a description of a functions lesson focusing on the function of 'inviting'.

Answer Key



Task 2 – Feedback

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

Task 3 – Feedback

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

Task 4 – Feedback

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



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