



A Task-Based Approach to English Language Learning

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The task-based approach to language learning aims to elicit the target language from students using a real-life context. According to Long (1985), ‘tasks’ require students to produce language so as to achieve real results, such as making an airline reservation or extending a dinner invitation. A generally accepted definition of ‘task’ seems to be to elicit language use in general. Students, when performing a task, function primarily as language users in the sense that they must employ the same kinds of communicative processes as those involved in real-world activities. Thus, there is a clear distinction between tasks and the exercises which dominate traditional language classrooms: a task allows students to develop their linguistic skills while performing the communicative activity, while an exercise merely reviews language skills the students are ‘supposed’ to have acquired already. For the benefit of students, a wide range of communicative tasks should be included into lesson planning as much as possible.

Each task requires a rubric, or what can be referred to as the instructions of the task. The students need to be informed very clearly what the purpose of the task is, what its expected outcomes are, and what they need to do to reach the outcomes. The rubric constitutes what Lee (2000) calls “a mechanism for structuring and sequencing interaction as the students perform the task”.

Tasks, in addition to being well-planned, should be authentic, meaning that they should correspond to some real-world activity. Such real-world tasks might be: borrowing a library book, ordering lunch from a restaurant menu, or completing application forms for things such as bank accounts, doctor appointments or scholarships, or negotiating prices at the market, etc. The internet is an excellent source of real materials, including menus and application forms.

Communicative language tasks can incorporate all of the language skills, but they often focus on speaking and writing. Tasks therefore require students to both process and produce language. The production of language can be thought of as the ‘outcome’ of the task: the outcome refers to what the learners arrive at when they have completed the task, for example a story, a list of differences, a completed application form, etc.

The following are essential features of a task:

- 1- A task is a plan for student activity.
- 2- A task involves a primary focus on meaning which requires learners to engage with and use the language.
- 3- A task involves real-world processes of language use.
- 4- A task can involve any of the four language skills.
- 5- A task engages cognitive processes.
- 6- A task has a clearly defined communicative outcome.

The following are examples of primarily oral communicative tasks:

Activity 1 A Dangerous Moment

Student A: Have you ever been in a situation where you felt your life was in danger? Describe the situation to your partner. Tell her/him what happened. Give an account of how you felt when you were in danger and afterwards.

Student B: Listen to your partner tell you about a dangerous moment in his/her life. Draw a picture to show what happened to your partner. Show him/her your picture when you have finished it.

Activity 2 Asking for Help

Work in pairs. One student looks at card A. The other looks at card B. Create and practice the conversation.

Card A	Card B
You are a student. You want your friend to help you with some homework.	You are a student. Your friend wants you to help him/her with homework. You don't really want to.
A: Check if B is busy.	A:
B:	B: Tell him/her you are not doing anything.
A: Try to persuade him/her.	A:
B:	B: Refuse, give a reason.
	A:
	B: Agree reluctantly