

Teaching Reading and Writing

Task-based learning

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Learning outcomes

This module of teaching reading and writing focuses on giving learners tasks to improve reading and writing skills. By the end of the module you will be able to:

- define task-based learning
- identify important stages in a task-based learning lesson
- identify the role of the teacher in task-based learning
- explain how task-based learning can practise and improve reading and writing skills
- use task-based learning in your lessons.

1 Before you watch

Task-based learning involves the teacher giving learners meaningful tasks. These tasks often mimic real-life tasks and situations. Although the teacher may ask learners to think about the language they use to complete the tasks, the main focus is on the task itself. Project work is task-based learning.

a. Have you ever done any kind of task-based learning with your learners?

b. How might task-based learning apply to teaching reading and writing?

Try to compare your answers with a partner.

2 Watch

2.1 A task-based learning lesson

- a. Watch and listen to the commentary at the beginning of the video **Task-based learning: Part 1** (00:00 to 01:05). Then pause the video. According to the trainer, what are the benefits of task-based learning?

- b. Watch and listen again and fill in the gaps in the text below.

“Task-based learning is really _____ for students mainly because the tasks are _____, _____ and require them to work in _____ which they prefer. Task-based learning can also appeal to different _____ and is often _____.”

- c. The trainer continues:

“Task-based learning usually starts with input from reading or listening. The learners are then required to complete the task through speaking or writing. It is therefore a very meaningful way to practise reading and writing and also combines these skills with speaking and listening.”

How does task-based learning practise reading and writing meaningfully?

2.2 Applying task-based learning

a. Look at the following classroom task and answer the questions below:

Country Presentation

Work in a group of four. Choose an English-speaking country. Find out about:

- Geographical location and size
- Industry
- Population size
- A famous person from this country
- The national flag
- One other interesting fact

Use this information to design a five-minute presentation to give to the class next week.

Timing: two lessons

1. In what way is the task motivating for learners?
2. How does it appeal to different learning styles, for example, auditory, kinaesthetic and visual?
3. In what way is it cross-curricular?
4. What language skills are practised as part of the task?
5. How could you use this kind of task with younger learners?
6. How could you use this task without access to computers and the internet?

b. Look at these four tasks and choose one you could use with one of your classes.

i.

Writing Telephone Messages

Work in pairs. Listen to the following phone messages left on the answering machine for your English-speaking guest. You can listen as many times as you like.

Write a note to your guest summarising the messages and highlighting any actions he/she needs to take.

Time: one to two lessons

ii.

Applying for a job

Work in groups of three. One of you will be applying for a job. Choose who it is and discuss the kind of job he/she would like.

Look through the job advertisements in the newspaper. Find a job to suit your job-hunter. Write a letter applying for the job.

Time: two lessons

iii.

Conducting and reporting on class research

Work in pairs. Choose a subject that you want to do class research on e.g. favourite music, family, ambitions etc. Write a questionnaire with 4 questions and give it to 10 classmates to fill in.

Read the completed questionnaires and write a short report of your findings.

Time: two lessons

iv.

Replying to an email with recommendations on what to do in your town

Work in groups of four. Read the email from Giorgio who is going to spend the day in your town with his family. Look at the interests and needs described in the email and discuss the most suitable places for the family to visit.

Write an email making recommendations to Giorgio and his family.

Time: one to two lessons

c. What kind of preparatory work would you need to do for the task you have chosen?

2.3 Stages of a task-based learning lesson

Watch the rest of the video **Task-based learning: Part 1** (01:15 to 16:00) and answer these questions.

a. What task (from the previous page) is demonstrated in the video?

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b. What kind of preparatory work do the learners do to help them complete the task?

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c. How does the teacher facilitate the process?

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2.4 Teacher interview

Watch the video **Task-based learning: Part 2** (00:00 to 04:00). The teacher is talking about his experience of teaching task-based learning.

a. What does the teacher like about task-based learning?

b. How does the teacher see his role in the lesson?

c. What two tips does he have for facilitating task-based learning?

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3 Making writing tasks accessible

Look at this idea for making a writing task more accessible.

The learners are given a task which involves some reading, followed by a problem solving activity that they have to answer in writing. After doing the reading the learners get together in groups. In their first language they discuss the reading and the activity they have to do. When they are satisfied that they understand clearly what they have to do, they individually do the activity in English.

Nation, I.S.P., (2009) Teaching ESL/EFL Reading and Writing, Routledge

a. What do you think about the role of a learner's first language in task-based learning?

4 Reflection

Think about the next few classes that you are going to teach as part of your syllabus. If you use a coursebook, look through the next few units. What task could you organise that would link to your syllabus or the coursebook?

Transcripts and answers

Transcripts of trainer's talk

2.1 A task-based learning lesson

Task-based learning is really motivating for students mainly because the tasks are real, interactive and require them to work in groups, which they prefer. Task-based learning can also appeal to different learning styles and is often cross-curricular.

Task-based learning usually starts with input from reading or listening. The learners are then required to complete the task through speaking or writing. It is therefore a very meaningful way to practise reading and writing and also combines these skills with speaking and listening.

Now let's look at task-based learning in action with a lower secondary class of learners in Turkey. As you watch the film, make notes to answer the questions in the viewing task. The answers will appear at the end of the sequence.

2.4 Teacher interview

In this section, listen to the teacher talk about his professional experience of task-based learning and the lesson he has just given. Answer the questions in the viewing task.

Answers

2.1 A task-based learning lesson

- a. The benefits of task-based learning according to the trainer:
- it motivates learners because tasks are real, interactive and require them to work in groups which they prefer
 - it appeals to different learning styles
 - it is often cross-curricular
 - it practises reading and writing meaningfully
 - it can combine reading and writing with other skills.
- b. “Task-based learning is really **motivating** for students mainly because the tasks are **real, interactive** and require them to work in **groups**, which they prefer. Task-based learning can also appeal to different **learning styles** and is often **cross-curricular**.”
- c. Task-based learning practises reading and writing ‘meaningfully’ because learners must read and write to achieve the task so there is a genuine communicative goal.

2.2 Applying task-based learning

1. In what way is the task motivating for learners?

- they are working in groups
- they have some choice of which country to study and what information to present
- it uses computers.

2. How does it appeal to different learning styles, for example, auditory, kinaesthetic and visual?

- auditory – discussing the task and giving/listening to the presentations
- kinaesthetic – researching on the computer/ in books and designing the presentation
- visual – looking at maps and flags and designing the presentations.

3. In what way is it cross-curricular?

- links to geography.

4. What language skills are practised as part of the task?

- speaking and listening – discussing the task and giving the presentation
- reading - researching the task (in books or on the internet)
- writing – writing the presentation.

5. How could you use this kind of task with younger learners?

- reduce and change the focus of the research e.g. finding out just three or four facts which match their age and interest
- presenting it in their notebooks with illustrations and diagrams.

6. How could you use this task without access to computers and the internet?

- use maps/books from school/ town library for research
- make poster presentations or write in notebooks.

2.3 Stages of a task-based learning lesson

Which task is demonstrated in the video?

- replying to an email with recommendations on what to do in your town.

What kind of preparatory work do the learners do to help them complete the task?

- brainstorming ideas (things to do in Istanbul)
- practising functional language needed to complete the task (making suggestions)
- writing an email in reply (to another email).

How does the teacher facilitate the process?

- getting learners interested in the task and keeping them interested
- managing time
- helping learners to generate ideas
- providing learners with functional language to do the task
- monitoring group work to make sure learners are on task.

2.4 Teacher interview

What does the teacher like about task-based learning?

Task-based learning is more meaningful because there is an outcome at the end of the lesson (students produce something).

How does the teacher see his role in the lesson?

As a facilitator, the teacher gives students lots of free practice to develop learner autonomy:

- He monitors activities and is available to help if needed
- He corrects the final product.

What two tips does he have for facilitating task-based learning?

- Have a strong lead-in activity
- Introduce structures and vocabulary needed for the task.

3 Making writing tasks accessible

What do you think about the role of a learner's first language in task-based learning?

(This is one possible answer, you may have additional answers.)

Letting learners use their first language as part of the process of task-based learning makes the task accessible for all learners. It gives them time to check with each other that they have understood the task and also time to think and talk about how they will approach the task without having to worry about language. It is also a realistic stage to the process, that is, in real life when we do tasks in another language, we usually think about how we approach them in our own language first..

With thanks to Serhat Tomas and his class at Terakki Vakfi Okullari, Istanbul, Turkey.

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Video produced by Jane Boylan.