

Subsecretaría de Educación
Dirección Provincial de Educación Superior y Capacitación Educativa
Dirección de Capacitación

Maestros y Profesores enseñando y aprendiendo inglés

Curso: Introducción al diseño curricular de 2º ESB: Inglés

Class 4 On assessing language through tasks.

In the previous sections of this unit we have seen that in order to assess what students know we need to determine how they apply their communicative competence as well as their intercultural competence when creating discourse. This type of assessment that is based on giving students the chance to use language for real purposes in realistic situations is what we call performance assessment (MacKay, 2006: 98). This means that we will be using **tasks** to engage students in meaning focused activity in order to assess their ability to interact and negotiate meanings.

What do we mean by **tasks**?

You are suggested to do task 1 in Class 4 task.

As we have seen, tasks are goal oriented and they engage learners in comprehending and making meanings. Tasks they may involve listening, speaking, reading or writing or a combination of these activities.

Language use tasks may involve extended and complex activity or they may occur in simple supported ways.

Let us now consider a series of task types that can be included in task based assessment.

4.1. Tasks to assess the speaking

Luouma (2004) refers to the following variety of speaking tasks that can be used both for paired assessment (when we assess two students at the same time) or one to one assessment interviews (when we assess the student individually).

- Description tasks: those tasks in which students are required to describe something they know. For example in one to one situations students can be asked to describe their homes, or best friend, etc. while in paired assessment they might be given similar pictures and they might have to describe their pictures to their partners without their partners looking to find out differences.
- Narrative tasks: they involve telling about a sequence of events by providing students with pictures or asking them to tell about a personal story. This task can take place in paired assessment when students tell about a story together,

which requires more demands on students since it adds negotiation of meanings to the task as well as making sense of the story for themselves.

- Instruction tasks: they involve giving directions and instructions to get a message across. For example the student is requested to give directions in order to reach a certain place or telling someone else what to do (for example to clean the house). In paired assessment one student gives the instruction and the other follows them and then they exchange roles.
- Comparing and contrasting tasks: these tasks, which are more complex than describing tasks, require students to compare and contrast information from pictures or any other source. For example, students might find differences between pictures or describe how a certain information differs from another.
- Explaining and predicting tasks: they involve explaining the contents of a graph or explaining a process. This task type is particularly relevant for content based study settings in which students are asked to explain information from different sources.
- Decision tasks: they “involve discussing the issue that the decision concerns from a number of perspectives and then making a decision... The speakers express their opinions about the concerns and justify them in order to air different viewpoints before negotiating the conclusion”(Ibid: 151). These tasks are interactive and they can be carried out with the teacher but it is preferable to use them in paired assessment.
- Role plays and simulations: they involve the simulation of different kinds of communication situations or acting out a new role in a specific situation. It can be carried out both in paired assessment as well as in one to one assessment situations.
- Reacting in situations tasks: They involve an explanation of a certain situation and they request a response from the student such as “What do you say?” They are typically used in one to one assessment.
- Structured speaking tasks: “they control quite closely what the examinees are going to say” (Ibid: 158). The student is given a card in which they receive cues on what to say.

You are expected to do task 2 from Class 4 task

4.2. Tasks to assess listening

Buck (2001) describes a series of tasks to assess students’ understanding stated information on a semantic level, understanding gist, understanding detail, inferring implicit meanings, context clues, etc. The following tables have been taken from Buck (2001: 135-136) and they show a list of possible task types.

<i>Table 5.2. Tasks for testing understanding of literal meanings</i>

Body movement tasks

- | |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Test-takers are given commands to move various body parts (raise your right hand, go to the door etc.). |
|---|

- Simon says: test-takers are given commands to move various body parts (e.g. raise your right hand, go to the door etc.) and only do so if the command is preceded by 'Simon says'.

- Test-takers are told to draw a certain object (e.g. draw a rose, draw a circle if you are a girl etc.).

Retention tasks

- Test-takers listen to two utterances and indicate whether they were the same or different.

- Test-takers listen to an utterance and write it down.

Picture tasks

- Test-takers listen to a statement, and then look at a number of pictures and indicate which represents the statement.

- Test-takers look at a picture and listen to a number of statements, and then choose which is relevant to the picture.

- Test-takers are given a pile of about ten pictures and listen to a series of utterances; they have to choose a picture of the object mentioned in each utterance.

- Test-takers are shown a complex picture with many things happening in it, they hear a series of statements about the picture and indicate whether these are true or false.

- Test-takers look at four pictures labeled A, B, C and D, and listen to a series of utterances (e.g. it is raining, the man is wearing a suit) and indicate which picture each utterance applies to.

- Test-takers look at five small pictures, listen to four short utterances, and select the picture being described in each utterance.

- Test-takers see a series of simple diagrams (e.g. lines, squares, rectangles, circles etc. arranged in a variety of patterns), listen to statements describing these, and indicate which diagram is being described.

Conversation tasks

- Test-takers listen to a statement followed by a response, and indicate A if the response was appropriate, and B if it was not.

- Test-takers listen to a question followed by three possible responses, and indicate which was the most appropriate.

- Test-takers listen to a statement followed by three possible continuations, and select the one that would continue the conversation best.

- Test-takers listen to a short dialogue (usually persons A, B and A again), and then listen to a short question about it, to which they choose one of three (or four) options (usually written in a booklet).

Self-evident comprehension tasks

- Test-takers are given a series of statements and asked to indicate whether they are true or false (e.g. the snow is white, Paris is in Spain).

- Test-takers listen to statements made about some sort of visual (or object), and indicate whether they are true or false.

- Test-takers are given arithmetic calculations and indicate whether they are right or wrong (e.g. three plus three is seven).

Adapted from Valette (1977) **and** Heaton (1990)

Table 5.3. Tasks for going beyond local literal meanings

Understanding gist

- Test-takers listen to recordings from the radio, and indicate what type of programme they are listening to (e.g. news, sports, weather, fashion etc.).

- Test-takers listen to a description of a person, place or thing they are all familiar with, and write down its name, or what it is (perhaps in their native language).

General passage comprehension

- Test-takers listen to a monologue or dialogue, and then answer a number of multiple-choice questions (either spoken or written questions).
- Test-takers listen to a monologue or dialogue, and then answer a number of short-answer comprehension questions on it.
- Test-takers listen to a short talk or lecture, read a number of statements and select which are correct given the talk.
- Test-takers listen to a short talk or lecture and answer comprehension questions on it.
- Test-takers listen to a short talk or lecture, and then read a short summary of it in which some words or phrases have been deleted and replaced with blanks; they fill in the blanks with content appropriate to the talk.

Information transfer tasks

- Test-takers are given a map and a starting point, they follow directions on the map, and then indicate the destination (the instructions can be extremely complex and as an example Heaton (1990) recommends listening to a description of a robbery and then following the police chase, periodically indicating where the robbers are).
- Test-takers listen to an announcement of some information (e.g. a timetable or result of a competition) and fill in the information in a grid.
- Test-takers are given a goal (e.g. arrive in Paris before midnight, solve a problem), they listen to an announcement or explanation, find the information necessary to complete their goal, and then do the task.
- Test-takers listen to a person on the telephone and take a message according to the speaker's instructions.
- Test-takers look at a picture (e.g. a street scene, a room) and draw in objects or other details according to instructions (draw a table and two chairs in front of the café; draw a vase of flowers on top of the table); this can be expanded into a narrative (or dialogue).
- Test-takers see a series of pictures and listen to a talk or discussion and then classify the pictures based on that (e.g. a set of children's drawings representing different developmental stages, which need to be put in order based on a talk about child development).

Adapted from Valette (1977) and Heaton (1990)

4.3. Tasks to assess reading

TASK : The purpose of this task is to draw conclusions on how listening and reading can be assessed similarly through tasks involving comprehension. (You are expected to spend at least 30 minutes on this task. When you have finished proceed with the next section of this module. Remember you can always discuss your ideas with your tutor and mate teachers.)

Use the charts presented for listening and adapt them to reading. Is there any other task type that you would like to include?

1.3.4. Tasks to assess writing

Written production in secondary school requires tasks that support students providing the necessary background knowledge and that establish the purposes for writing. This is why Weir's (1993) categorization of controlled tasks is particularly relevant for our teaching context by means of which students have to respond to or transfer given information from different sources.

- Responding as an interlocutor to a specific oral or written passage (with and without cues on the answer that should be provided). Ex. Answering a letter, giving an opinion on a film, etc.
- Responding to information given in chart form: in which students might have to describe, compare or narrate for different purposes and in different genre types.
- Responding by using information given from a variety of sources both linguistic and non linguistic (pictures, graphs, notes, short dialogues, poems, films, songs) through a new text that uses the information given for different purposes and in different genre types. Ex. From maps of the weather students write down the weather forecast that was read on the radio.
- Information transfer tasks: using information from non verbal sources (pictures, graphs, maps, photos,) and transferring it into written language for a variety of purposes and in different genres.