LESSON FRAMEWORKS · SPEAKING

Task-Based Learning - Speaking

A framework for planning and teaching speaking lessons

TBL overview

Task-Based Learning (TBL) puts meaningful communication at the centre of the lesson. Learners complete tasks with a clear, real-world outcome, using the language and communication strategies they already have.

In a speaking lesson, the pre-task stages focus on the sub-skills and strategies the task requires, not on grammar presented in advance. Most language work comes after the task, based on how learners performed.

The delivery sequence – the stages of your lesson



TEACHING TIP

In TBL, the emphasis is on communication, not on pre-selected language items. Language work is driven by what learners need and do during the task, so keep the post-task Language Focus flexible and adapt it to how learners performed the main speaking task.

The planning process – build it in reverse

Plan backwards from the outcome you want, then teach forwards. Start with your aims and the main speaking task, so that every other stage is built to serve them, not the other way round.

PLAN IN THIS ORDER	STEP 1 Aims	STEP 2 Speaking task	STEP 3 Task preparation	STEP 4 Noticing	STEP 5 Language focus	STEP 6 Task repetition	STEP 7 Lead-in

RUNNING EXAMPLE Throughout the steps below, we plan one lesson: booking a hotel room over the phone.

1 Aims

GUIDES EVERY STAGE

Main aim

Think of a communicative objective and the linguistic objectives that support it, both set in a relevant context. The communicative objective is what learners will achieve in the main speaking task. The linguistic objectives are the target speaking sub-skills, communication strategies and the language that expresses them. Together, they help learners achieve the communicative outcome.

EXAMPLE · HOTEL BOOKING

Communicative objective: make a booking over the phone

Context: a hotel

Linguistic objectives: asking and answering questions about personal and room details, spelling names, checking understanding and asking for repetition

Secondary aim

Think of an aim in a different skill or language area that supports the main task. It should complement the main aim, not repeat it.

EXAMPLE · HOTEL BOOKING

Learners listen to a recording of a hotel booking during the Noticing stage. The secondary aim is to help them identify specific information (e.g. names, dates and room details) and take notes.

Statement of aims

Combine both into a clear statement of what learners will be able to do by the end of the lesson.

EXAMPLE · HOTEL BOOKING

Main aim: By the end of the lesson, learners will be better able to book a hotel room over the phone, giving and collecting accurate personal and room details, spelling names, checking understanding and asking for repetition.

Secondary aim: By the end of the lesson, learners will be better able to listen for specific information and take notes.

2 Speaking task

TAUGHT AT STAGE 4

Think about the communicative objective, context and target sub-skills from your aims.

Design or choose a speaking task that:

- ☐ has a clear communicative outcome
- ☐ focuses on the outcome rather than on pre-selected language, while creating a real need to produce language
- ☐ reflects the spontaneous, unpredictable nature of real communication (problems, conflicts, unexpected events)
- ☐ is interactive
- ☐ is authentic and relates to real-life situations
- ☐ is flexible enough to be repeated
- ☐ offers a suitable cognitive and linguistic challenge

> **EXAMPLE · HOTEL BOOKING**
>
> Learners role-play a phone booking using role cards with new identities and specific details. The guest books a particular room type for set dates; the receptionist records all the required details correctly. The phone format creates natural communication breakdowns, and swapping cards or partners allows role reversal and repetition.

Typical tasks: discussions, debates, information, knowledge or opinion gaps, problem solving, ordering, ranking, comparing, role-plays, interviews

3 Task preparation

TAUGHT AT STAGE 3

Think about the main speaking task you have just designed or chosen.

Design or choose a preparation activity that helps learners:

- ☐ understand the objective of the task and their roles and responsibilities
- ☐ brainstorm the information and ideas they will need
- ☐ rehearse what to say and do, often mentally or through note-taking

> **EXAMPLE · HOTEL BOOKING**
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> Learners receive their role cards, read their roles and objectives individually, anticipate possible communication breakdowns, and note down key words or ideas (not full sentences) to use as prompts during the task.

Typical tasks: brainstorming ideas, noting key words, mental or spoken rehearsal

4 Noticing

TAUGHT AT STAGE 2

Think about the main speaking task and the target sub-skills and strategies from your main aim.

Design or choose:

- ☐ a spoken or written model (a dialogue or monologue) of someone doing the same or a similar task to the one learners will do later
- ☐ an activity that uses the model to raise awareness of the sub-skills and communication strategies the speakers use to complete the task successfully

> **EXAMPLE · HOTEL BOOKING**
> Learners listen to a recording of a guest booking a hotel room, in which both speakers use the target sub-skills and strategies. First, learners tick the expressions for personal details and spelling names that they hear. Then they read the audio script, find where communication broke down, and underline the expressions the speakers use to check understanding or ask for repetition. Finally, the teacher shows a summary of the expressions and strategies used.

Typical tasks: comprehension questions, gap-fills, labelling, categorising, identifying expressions, sentence correction, discussion questions

5 Language focus

TAUGHT AT STAGE 5

Think about the main speaking task and the target sub-skills and strategies from your main aim.

This is a reactive stage: what you focus on depends on how learners perform in the task, so you can't plan it in full. You can, however, plan its shape.

Plan feedback that includes:

- ☐ positive reinforcement of the sub-skills and strategies covered in the lesson
- ☐ delayed error correction, including pronunciation
- ☐ reflection: what learners are now more aware of, what improved, and what they can still improve

> **EXAMPLE · HOTEL BOOKING**
> While learners do the role-play, note down language related to the linguistic objectives. In feedback, write up two effective expressions and two that need work, and ask learners to improve the latter.

Typical tasks: positive feedback on language use, delayed error correction, reflection questions

> **TEACHING TIP**
> Published materials, such as coursebooks, rarely include feedback activities after a speaking task. Plan some feedback focus areas in advance and make sure they match your aims.

6 Task repetition

STAGE 6 · OPTIONAL BUT DESIRABLE

Think about the main speaking task.

Plan for learners to do the main speaking task again, ideally with a different partner. Alternatively, design or choose a similar task that requires learners to apply what they have learned to improve accuracy, fluency and complexity.

> EXAMPLE · HOTEL BOOKING
>
> Learners repeat the role-play with a new set of identities and details. Wrap up with general reflection: What do you think you improved most today? What would you like to improve further? Which expressions from today will be most useful outside the classroom?

Ways to vary a repetition: change partners or swap roles; use new role cards with different details; shorten the time limit (e.g. 4–3–2 minutes); add a complication or unexpected event; have pairs perform for the class (a report stage)

7 Lead-in

TAUGHT AT STAGE 1

Think about the communicative objective and context from your aims.

Design or choose a lead-in activity that:

- ☐ stimulates interest in the topic
- ☐ activates relevant knowledge
- ☐ gets learners talking about the topic

> EXAMPLE · HOTEL BOOKING
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> Learners look at a picture of guests at a hotel reception and discuss: Have you ever booked a hotel in English? What information does a receptionist usually need? Is it easier to book in person or over the phone? Why?

Typical tasks: brainstorming, predictions, questionnaires, discussions, mingling activities, visuals, games

> TEACHING TIP
>
> As long as you start planning with your main aim and the speaking task, you can plan the other stages in any order. What matters is keeping the context, objectives and outcomes in sight, so that every activity purposefully supports the others.