LESSON FRAMEWORKS · WRITING

Task-Based Learning - Writing

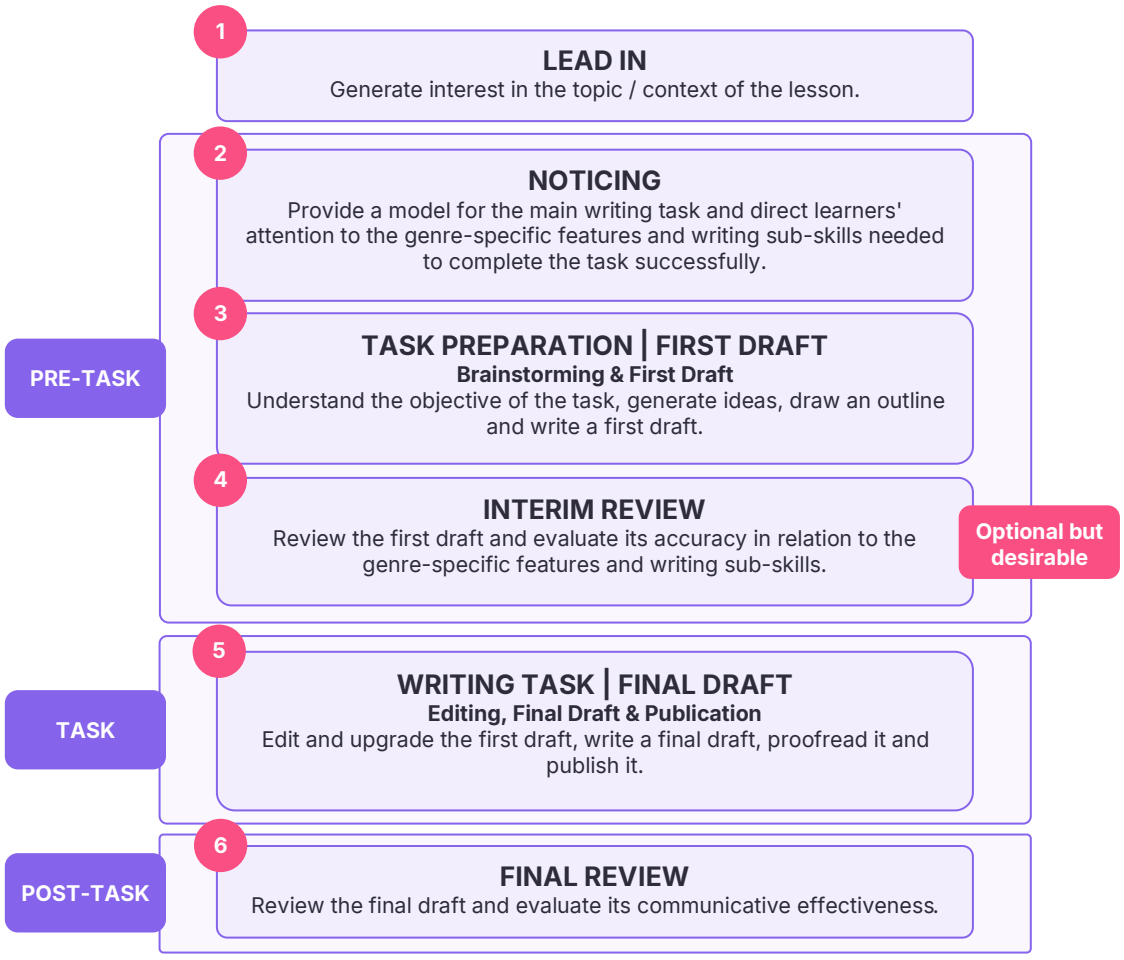
A framework for planning and teaching writing lessons

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 they already have.

In a writing lesson, TBL works well with a process-genre approach. Learners analyse the typical features of a genre (content, organisation, language and style) and follow a real writing process: planning, drafting, reviewing, redrafting, proofreading and publishing.

The delivery sequence – the stages of your lesson



TEACHING TIP

In a writing lesson, the process matters as much as the product. Use the first draft and the interim review to give learners a real chance to notice and upgrade their writing, rather than treating the final draft as a one-off test.

The planning process – build it in reverse

Plan backwards from the outcome you want, then teach forwards. Start with your aims and the main writing 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 Writing task	STEP 3 Task preparation	STEP 4 Noticing	STEP 5 Interim review	STEP 6 Final review	STEP 7 Lead-in

RUNNING EXAMPLE Throughout the steps below, we plan one lesson: writing a letter of complaint about a damaged item bought online.

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 writing task. The linguistic objectives are the target genre features (content and organisation, vocabulary and functional language, style) and writing sub-skills (e.g. following the writing process, accurate grammar, correct spelling). Together, they help learners achieve the communicative outcome.

EXAMPLE · LETTER OF COMPLAINT

Communicative objective: write a letter of complaint requesting a refund or exchange

Context: a damaged item bought online

Genre features: four-paragraph organisation (purpose > purchase details > problem > demand); expressions such as I am writing to... and I expect...; vocabulary to describe problems; formal style

Writing sub-skills: following the writing process, accurate verb tenses, correct spelling

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 · LETTER OF COMPLAINT

Learners read a model letter of complaint during the Noticing stage. The secondary aim is to help them read for purpose, content and organisation.

Statement of aims

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

EXAMPLE · LETTER OF COMPLAINT

Main aim: By the end of the lesson, learners will be better able to write a formal letter of complaint requesting a refund or exchange for a damaged item bought online, with clear organisation, appropriate vocabulary and functional language, accurate verb tenses and correct spelling.

Secondary aim: By the end of the lesson, learners will be better able to identify the purpose, content and organisation of a text.

2 Writing task | Final draft

TAUGHT AT STAGE 5

Think about the communicative objective, context, genre features and writing sub-skills from your aims.

Design or choose a writing task that:

- ☐ has a clear communicative outcome
- ☐ focuses on both the outcome and the writing process, rather than on pre-selected language
- ☐ has a specific reader
- ☐ requires learners to produce their own meaningful message, not copy a model
- ☐ is authentic and relates to real-life situations
- ☐ offers a suitable cognitive and linguistic challenge

> **EXAMPLE · LETTER OF COMPLAINT**
> Learners write a letter of complaint to the seller of a faulty item they bought on an online marketplace (learners choose the item), asking for a refund or exchange. They use the feedback from the interim review to write a final draft, proofread it and publish it, e.g. by displaying it on the classroom wall or posting it on a class blog.

Typical tasks: emails, letters, reviews, reports, descriptions, summaries, stories, essays, blog posts

3 Task preparation | First draft

TAUGHT AT STAGE 3

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

Design or choose a preparation activity that helps learners:

- ☐ understand the objective of the task and who they are writing to
- ☐ brainstorm the information and ideas they will need
- ☐ outline the sections of the text, usually as notes
- ☐ write a first draft

> **EXAMPLE · LETTER OF COMPLAINT**
> Learners complete a planning worksheet with one section for each paragraph, writing short notes only:
> **Purpose of writing:** Who are you writing to? Why are you writing?
> **Purchase details:** What did you buy, when and where?
> **Description of the problem:** What is wrong with the item?
> **Demand for action:** What do you want the seller to do?
> They then use their notes to write a first draft on a blank sheet.

Typical tasks: brainstorming ideas, outlining content, noting key words, drafting

4 Noticing

TAUGHT AT STAGE 2

Think about the main writing task and the target genre features and writing sub-skills from your main aim.

Choose a model text of the same or a similar genre, and design two tasks:

- ☐ Part 1: a task that establishes the context, purpose, content and organisation of the model
- ☐ Part 2: a task that raises awareness of the other genre features and writing sub-skills the writer uses to complete the task successfully

> **EXAMPLE · LETTER OF COMPLAINT**
>
> Learners analyse a model letter of complaint.
>
> **Part 1:** Learners skim the letter and match each paragraph to its function (purpose > purchase details > problem > demand). They then discuss: Who is the writer writing to? Why? What does the writer want to achieve?
>
> **Part 2:** Learners underline two adjectives that describe the problem, two useful verbs, one expression that opens the letter and one that makes the demand. Finally, they decide whether the letter is formal or informal, and why.

Typical tasks: comprehension questions, gap-fills, labelling, identifying expressions, matching paragraphs to functions

5 Interim review

STAGE 4 · OPTIONAL BUT DESIRABLE

Think about the main aim, the Noticing tasks and the main writing task.

Design or choose a review activity that helps learners evaluate the first draft against the genre features and writing sub-skills, and identify ways to improve it.

> **EXAMPLE · LETTER OF COMPLAINT**
>
> Learners swap first drafts and review each other's work with a checklist, making notes:
>
> - ☐ Is it clear who the writer is writing to and why?
> - ☐ Is it clear what the writer bought and what the problem is?
> - ☐ Is it clear what the writer wants the seller to do?
> - ☐ Are the paragraphs clearly organised?
> - ☐ Are the verbs in the correct tense? (Underline any that are not.)
> - ☐ Is the spelling correct? (Underline any mistakes.)
> - ☐ Is the style formal?
>
> Drafts and checklists go back to the writers, who use the feedback to write their final draft.

Typical tasks: peer-review checklists, rating scales, guiding questions, self-review

> **TEACHING TIP**
>
> Published materials, such as coursebooks, rarely include review activities. Design a checklist that reflects your aims.

6 Final review

TAUGHT AT STAGE 6

Think about the main writing task.

Design or choose a review activity that helps learners evaluate the final drafts for communicative effectiveness, i.e. the effect each text has on its reader. Then encourage learners to reflect on:

- ☐ the genre features and sub-skills they are now more aware of
- ☐ what improved between the first and final drafts
- ☐ what they can still improve

> **EXAMPLE · LETTER OF COMPLAINT**
> Learners display their letters around the room and read them in pairs (a gallery walk). They put a star on the letters most likely to get a refund or exchange: Which letter would definitely convince the seller? Why? Wrap up by asking: What do you think you improved most today? What would you like to improve further?

Typical tasks: gallery walks, reader-response questions, rating scales, reflection questions

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 · LETTER OF COMPLAINT**
> Learners look at the home page of an online marketplace and discuss: Have you ever bought something online? Has anything ever gone wrong? What did you do about it?

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

> **TEACHING TIP**
> As long as you start planning with your main aim and the writing 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.