LESSON FRAMEWORKS · WRITING

Task-Teach-Task - Writing

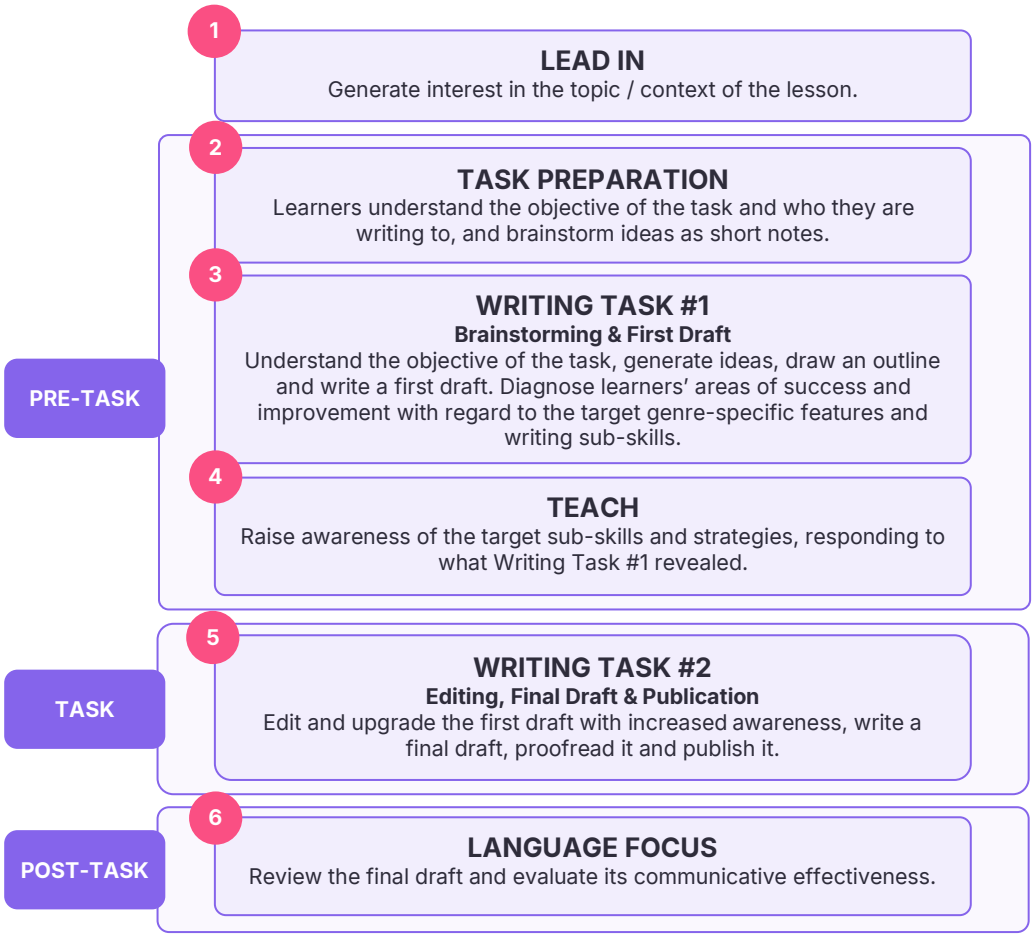
A framework for planning and teaching writing lessons

Task-Teach-Task overview

Task-Teach-Task (TTT) is a variation of Task-Based Learning for writing lessons. Learners write a first draft without any language input, and the teacher uses it to decide what to teach. Learners then edit and upgrade the same text.

It works best when learners can already write the text type but need to improve their use of genre features and writing sub-skills. It combines well with a process-genre approach: analysing a genre's content, organisation, language and style, and following a real writing process.

The delivery sequence – the stages of your lesson



TEACHING TIP

In a Task-Teach-Task lesson, plan the Teach stage around the target genre features and writing sub-skills, but be ready to adapt it. If the first drafts show that learners already handle some of them well, spend less time on those and focus on what they actually need.

The planning process – build it in reverse

Plan backwards from the outcome you want, then teach forwards. Start with your aims and the 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 tasks #1 and #2	STEP 3 Teach	STEP 4 Final review	STEP 5 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 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 Teach 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 tasks #1 and #2

TAUGHT AT STAGES 2, 3 AND 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

Then divide it into two stages around the same text:

- ☐ Writing task #1: learners understand the objective and the reader, generate ideas and write a first draft
- ☐ Writing task #2: learners edit and upgrade the same text, write a final draft, proofread it and publish it

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.

Task preparation: Learners answer content prompts in short notes: Who are you writing to? Why are you writing? What did you buy, and when? What is the problem? What do you want the seller to do?

Writing task #1: Learners use their notes to write a first draft on a blank sheet.

Writing task #2: After the Teach stage, learners edit their first draft, write a final draft, proofread it and publish it, e.g. on the classroom wall or a class blog.

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

TEACHING TIP

Keep the support light. The first draft shows you what learners need, so don't pre-teach the target genre features and sub-skills (e.g. don't give learners the paragraph structure or key vocabulary). Prompts should help learners generate content, not organise it.

3 Teach

TAUGHT AT STAGE 4

Think about the target genre features and writing sub-skills from your main aim, and what Writing task #1 is likely to reveal.

Use anonymised extracts from learners' first drafts, a model text, or both. Then choose a clarification approach.

Approach A · Teacher-led clarification

Use guided questions and board work to lead learners to an understanding of the target genre features and writing sub-skills: purpose, audience, content and organisation, language (vocabulary, functional language, grammar) and style.

> **EXAMPLE · LETTER OF COMPLAINT**
>
> Questions to ask learners about a model letter or extracts from their drafts:
>
> **Purpose and audience:** Why is the writer writing this letter? Who is the writer writing to?
>
> **Content and organisation:** How is the letter organised? What is the function of each paragraph?
>
> **Language:** What expressions does the writer use to open the letter and to make the demand? Which verb tenses describe the problem? Why?
>
> **Style:** Is the letter formal or informal? How do you know?

Typical tasks: teacher-led elicitation with guided questions, analysing anonymised extracts from first drafts, comparing extracts with a model, board work

Approach B · Learner-led clarification

Design or choose a task that helps learners discover the target genre features and writing sub-skills for themselves from a model text, working together.

> **EXAMPLE · LETTER OF COMPLAINT**
>
> Learners read a model letter of complaint in pairs.
>
> **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: guided questions, matching paragraphs to functions, sorting or categorising, true/false statements, identifying and underlining language, comparing texts

> **TEACHING TIP**
>
> Start the Teach stage as part of the feedback on Writing task #1. Show anonymised examples from learners' first drafts (e.g. opening lines, descriptions of the problem, tense errors), deal with errors and gaps on the spot, and use a model to show better alternatives. Teacher-led clarification usually suits TTT best, because it lets you respond selectively in the moment. Finish by asking learners to compare the model with their own draft and note down what they will change in Writing task #2.

4 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

5 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.