LESSON FRAMEWORKS · LANGUAGE SYSTEMS

Test – Teach - Test

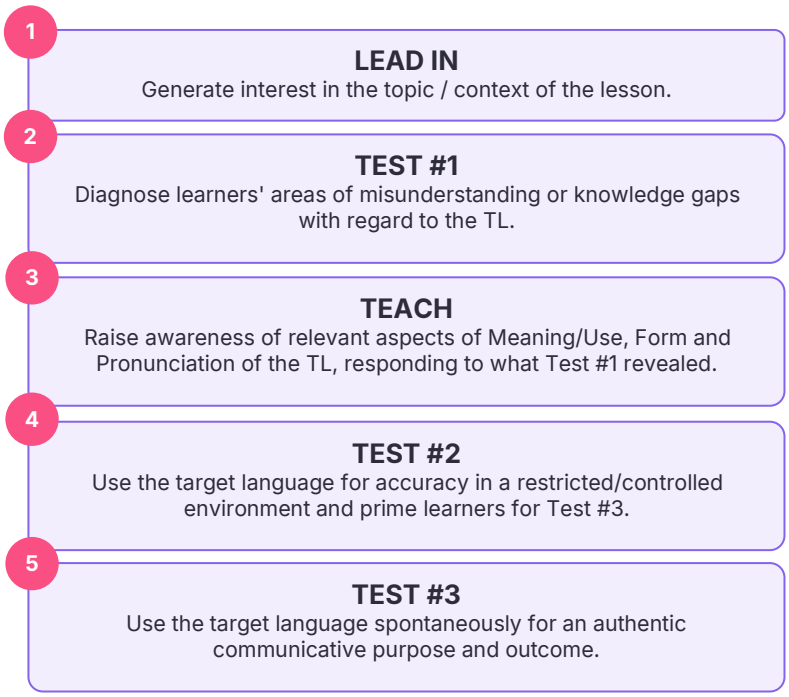
A framework for planning and teaching grammar, vocabulary and functions

TTT overview

Test–Teach–Test (TTT) is used to teach language systems: grammar, vocabulary or functions. It suits lessons where learners already know something about the target language (TL) but still find some aspects difficult.

A diagnostic test shows what learners need, the Teach stage responds to those needs, and two further tests let learners use the TL with growing freedom: Test #2 is controlled practice and Test #3 is freer practice. Tests don't have to be gap-fills or multiple choice: communicative activities work too.

The delivery sequence – the stages of your lesson



TEACHING TIP

In a TTT lesson, plan a thorough clarification of the TL in the Teach stage, but be ready to skip anything Test #1 shows learners already understand and use accurately. For example, if learners use the past simple forms accurately in Test #1, drop the part of your clarification on form 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 Test #3 activity, so that every earlier stage is built to serve them, not the other way round.

PLAN IN THIS ORDER	STEP 1	STEP 2	STEP 3	STEP 4	STEP 5	STEP 6
	Aims	Test #3	Test #2	Test #1	Teach	Lead-in

RUNNING EXAMPLE Throughout the steps below, we plan one lesson: talking about a past holiday using the past simple.

1 Aims

GUIDES EVERY STAGE

Main aim

Think of a communicative objective and the linguistic objective that supports it, both set in a relevant context. The communicative objective is what learners will achieve in the Test #3 activity (speaking or writing). The linguistic objective is the target language: the grammar, vocabulary or functional language of the lesson. Together, they help learners achieve the communicative outcome.

EXAMPLE · A PAST HOLIDAY

Communicative objective: have an informal conversation

Context: a past holiday

Target language: past simple questions and statements (regular and irregular verbs)

Secondary aim

Think of an aim in a different skill or language area that supports the lesson. It should complement the main aim, not repeat it. It often targets the productive skills and strategies learners need in Test #3 (speaking or writing).

EXAMPLE · A PAST HOLIDAY

Learners have an informal conversation in Test #3. The secondary aim is to help them choose topics and keep the conversation going.

Statement of aims

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

EXAMPLE · A PAST HOLIDAY

Main aim: By the end of the lesson, learners will be better able to have an informal conversation about a past holiday, using past simple questions and statements with regular and irregular verbs.

Secondary aim: By the end of the lesson, learners will be better able to choose topics and keep a conversation going.

2 Test #3 · Communicative practice

TAUGHT AT STAGE 5

Think about the communicative objective, context and target language from your aims.

Design or choose a speaking or writing activity that:

- ☐ has a clear communicative outcome
- ☐ creates a real need to use the TL spontaneously
- ☐ is authentic and relates to real-life situations
- ☐ focuses on fluency and communicative effectiveness, not on repeating the TL

> **EXAMPLE · A PAST HOLIDAY**
> In pairs, learners ask and answer five questions about their last holiday, adding at least one follow-up question each time. Then they decide whose holiday sounded more fun, and why.

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

Typical writing tasks: emails, messages, letters, reviews, descriptions, stories, summaries, short reports

3 Test #2 · Controlled practice

TAUGHT AT STAGE 4

Think about the Test #3 activity you have just designed or chosen, including its context and target language.

Design or choose a controlled or restricted practice activity that:

- ☐ consolidates learners' understanding and use of the TL
- ☐ encourages accurate but meaningful use of the TL
- ☐ prepares learners for the Test #3 activity

> **EXAMPLE · A PAST HOLIDAY**
> Learners write six questions about past holidays (three with regular verbs and three with irregular verbs) and note their own answers. This personalises the practice and gives them ready-made questions for Test #3.

Typical tasks: gap-fills in context, sentence completion, writing sentences or questions, error correction, matching, mingling, miming, games

4 Test #1 · Diagnostic

TAUGHT AT STAGE 2

Think about the Test #3 activity, its context and target language.

Design or choose a diagnostic activity that:

- ☐ shows what learners already know and can do with the TL
- ☐ covers the aspects of meaning, use, form and pronunciation you plan to teach
- ☐ gives you useful information on learners' needs, so you can plan what to focus on in the Teach stage

> **EXAMPLE · A PAST HOLIDAY**
> Learners complete a gapped dialogue about a past holiday. The gaps test auxiliaries in past simple questions and negative statements, and regular and irregular past forms (infinitives given in a box). The dialogue also includes some expressions for changing the topic and keeping the conversation going, to support the secondary aim.

Typical tasks: gap-fills, multiple choice, true/false, completing a table, labelling, sentence correction, open-ended questions

5 Teach

TAUGHT AT STAGE 3

Think about what Test #1 is likely to reveal. Then choose a clarification approach.

Approach A · Teacher-led clarification

Use concept-checking questions (CCQs), timelines and other techniques to guide learners to an understanding of the meaning, use, form and pronunciation of the TL.

> **EXAMPLE · A PAST HOLIDAY**
> Questions to ask learners about the dialogue from Test #1:
>
> **Meaning and use:** Are we talking about the present, past or future? Are the actions finished? Do we know when they happened?
>
> **Form:** How does the verb change? Is it the same for all verbs? How do we make negatives and questions?
>
> **Pronunciation:** How do we pronounce the -ed ending? /t/, /d/ or /ɪd/?

Typical tasks: teacher-led elicitation with CCQs, timelines, visuals, board work

Approach B · Learner-led clarification

Design or choose a task that helps learners work out the meaning, use, form and pronunciation of the TL for themselves, working together.

> **EXAMPLE · A PAST HOLIDAY**
> In pairs, learners answer questions about the completed dialogue from Test #1:
>
> **Meaning and use:** Are the speakers talking about finished or unfinished actions?
>
> **Form:** Look at the regular verbs. How do we form them? Infinitive + ____. Is the rule the same for irregular verbs?
>
> **Pronunciation:** Sort the regular verbs into three groups by the sound of the ending: /t/, /d/ or /ɪd/.

Typical tasks: guided questions, matching meaning to form, timelines, sorting or categorising, true/false statements, comparing examples

TEACHING TIP

Start the Teach stage as part of the feedback on Test #1. As you go through the answers, deal with errors and gaps on the spot and make your teaching points there and then. Teacher-led clarification usually suits TTT best, because it lets you respond selectively, in the moment, to what learners need.

6 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 · A PAST HOLIDAY

In pairs, learners discuss: When was the last time you had a holiday? Was it good or bad? Why?

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

TEACHING TIP

As long as you start planning with your main aim and Test #3, you can plan the other stages in any order. What matters is keeping the context, target language and communicative outcome in sight, so that every activity purposefully supports the others.