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Task-Based Language Teaching for Designing Grammar-Focused Communicative Activities

October 2nd @ 8 am or 1 pm EDT

TBLT

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Task-Based Language Teaching for Designing Grammar-Focused Communicative Activities

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) creates opportunities for students to use and develop language skills in the course of authentic communication.

Research suggests that TBLT can make students aware of grammatical form, meaning, and use while also preparing them for real-world English language tasks.

This presentation will:

- explain how to plan grammar-focused communicative tasks using TBLT principles; the example tasks can be modified for different school settings, learners, and grammar forms

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Jamila Barton

Jamila Barton has taught English to adults and children for 19 years in a variety of contexts, including EFL in Spain, ESL for immigrants and refugees in the United States, Computer-Assisted Language Learning, English for Specific Purposes, and courses for undergraduate and graduate international students. She also has experience in curriculum development and program coordination.

Jamila conducted teacher training and taught English linguistics while serving as a U.S. Department of State English Language Fellow in Jordan.

Currently, Jamila is a doctoral candidate in Applied Linguistics/ESL at Georgia State University with a focus on second language acquisition, literacy, and teacher professional development.

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Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) for Designing Grammar-Focused Communicative Activities

Session Overview

We will…

1. discuss the **principles of task-based language teaching** and define a 'task'

2. examine **criteria for selecting communicative tasks** for different grammatical features

3. review **considerations for designing** communicative grammar-focused tasks **and planning** task-based lessons

4. modify tasks for **different language learners and school contexts**.

How much of your **class time** is spent **teaching grammar**?

How much of your **class time** is spent on students **practicing and using grammar**?
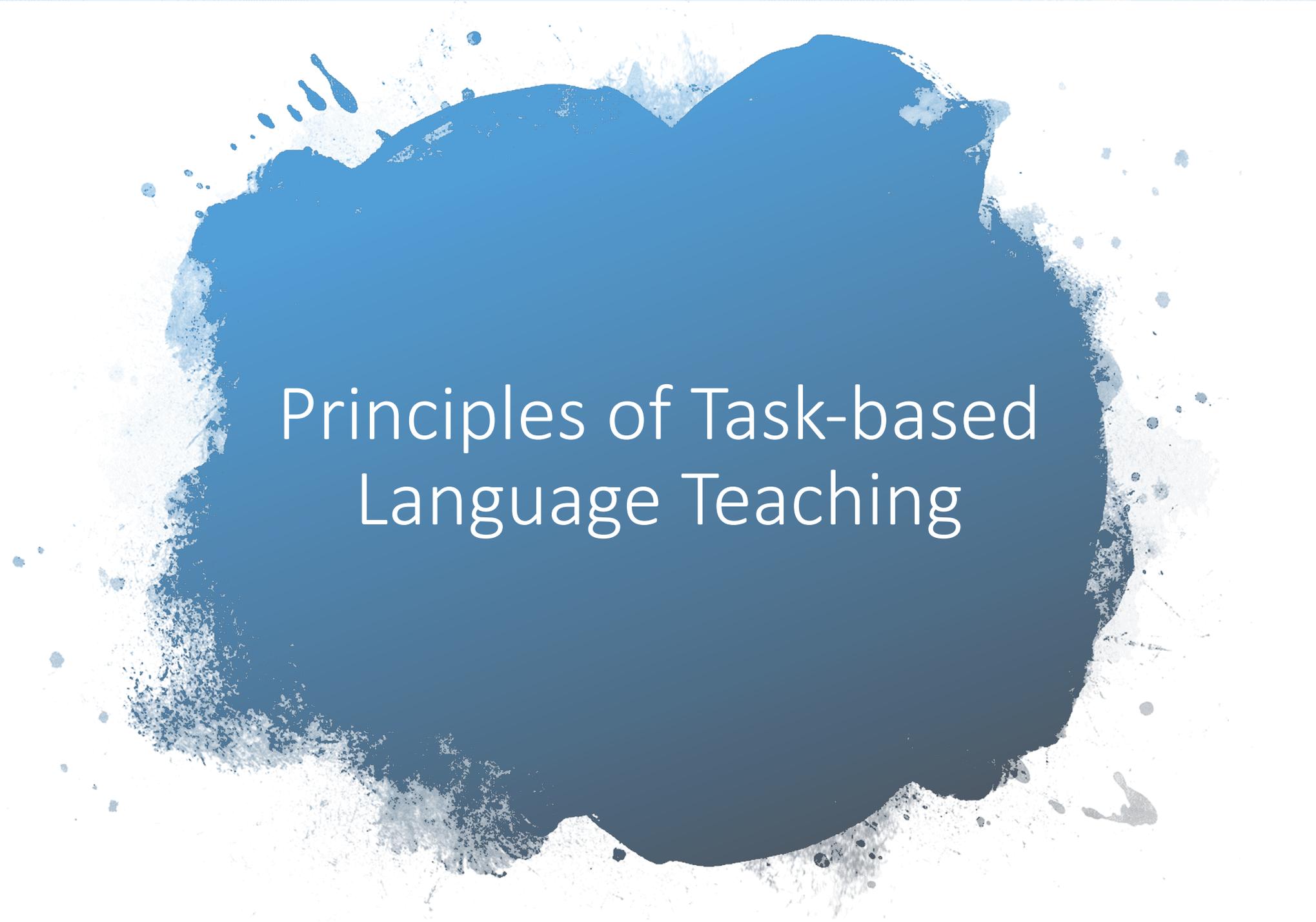
Principles of Task-based Language Teaching

The Language Teacher's Dilemma

How do we provide learners with **engaging grammar practice** with a focus on **form and accuracy**,

but

with a focus on **meaning** and how the structures are used **in real-world contexts**?

The Language Teacher's Dilemma

We design classroom **tasks based on real-world language activities** where students use grammatical structures to negotiate meaning and achieve communicative purposes

Task-Based Language Teaching

- Language is what we **use to create meaning and communicate**

- Learning only happens when the **learner is actively involved** in the process.

- The focus is on **knowing how to use the grammar structure in real situations**

Some Principles of TBLT

Learner-centered Design

Active student learning

Language Use in Context

Focus on form, meaning, and use

Sequenced Instruction

Activities build on each other

Language Learning Friendly

Recycle language structures
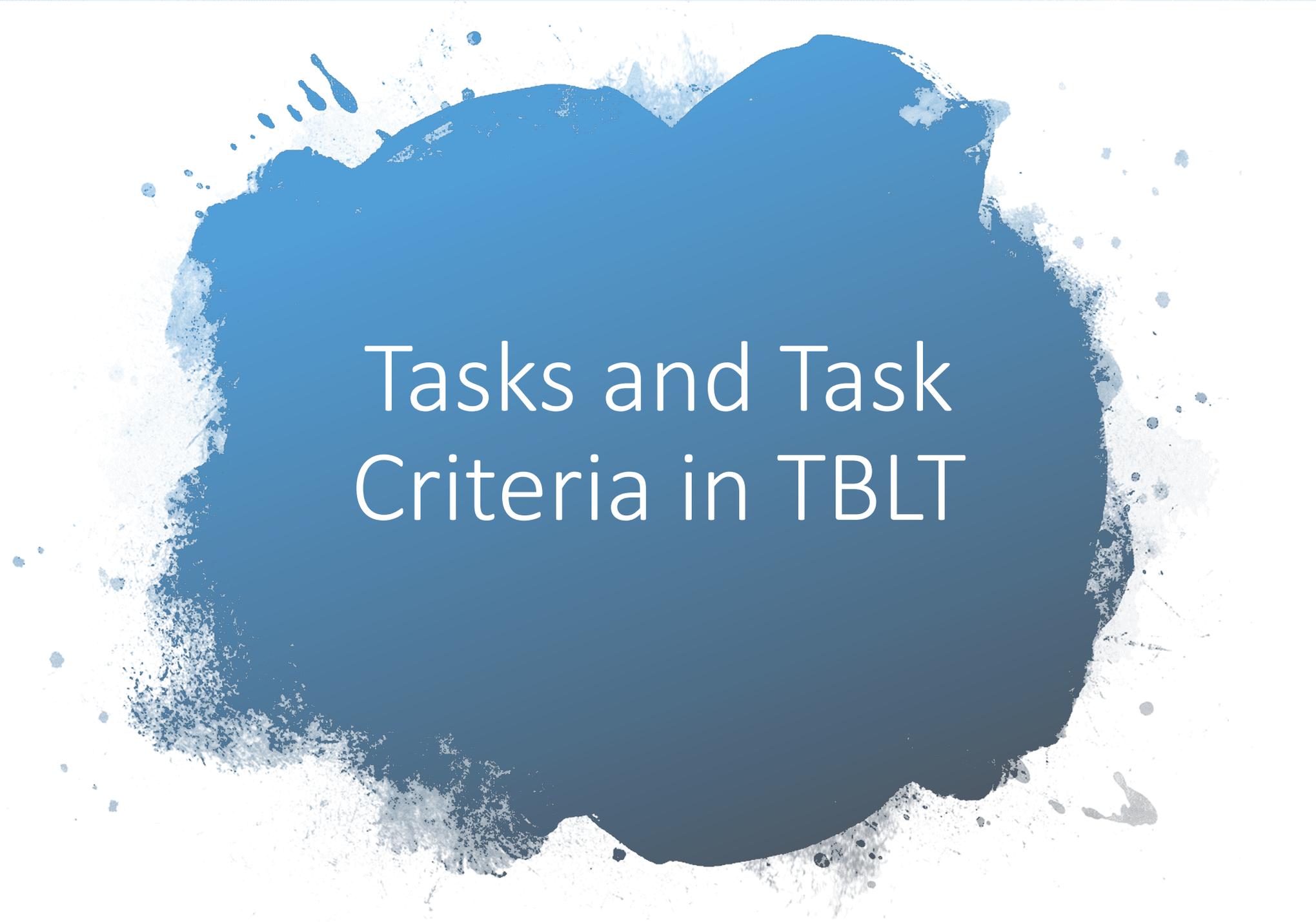
Tasks and Task Criteria in TBLT

What is a task?

"… **classroom work** that involve **learners**
in **comprehending**… or **interacting**
in the target language
while their **attention** is focused on
[using] their **grammatical knowledge** in order to
express **meaning**…"
(Adapted from Nunan, 2004, p. 4)

Task Criteria in the Language Classroom

- **Classroom tasks are related to real-world communicative activities**

- **Learners have to do something**

- **Learners use language to complete the activity**

- **There is a clearly defined outcome**
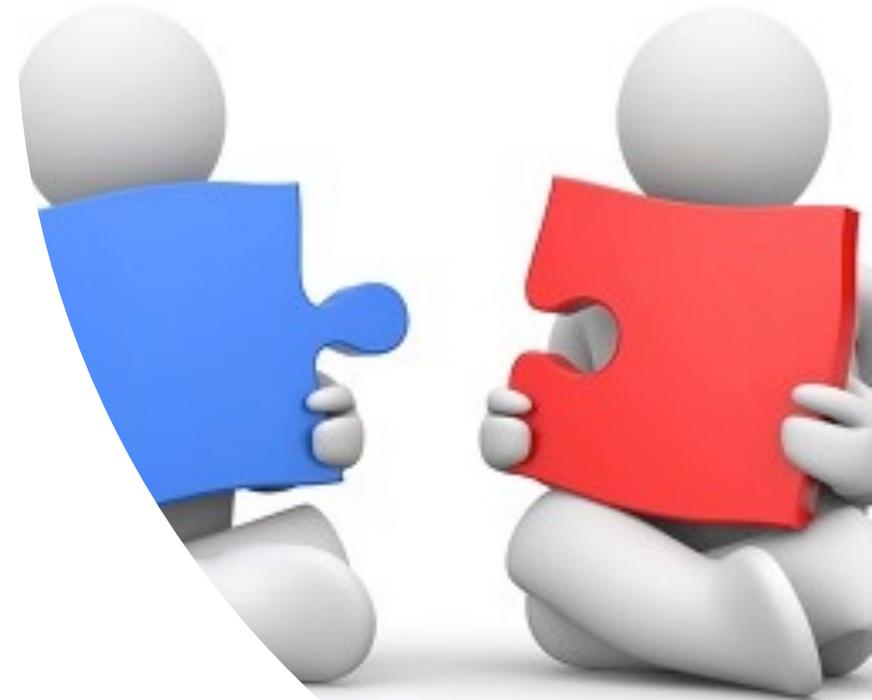
Can you think of a real-world task for the following grammar point?

Prepositions of place (e.g. on the desk)

Which of these two activities is a task?

Shopping List
Apples
Eggs
Bread

Store
Flour
Coca cola
Oranges
bread

Option 1:

Look at the shopping list and the items in the store.

Talk with your partner.

A: Do you have any ___?

B: Yes, I have some ___.

   No, I don't have any _.

Option 2:

Students work in pairs with separate information cards.

Student A

Here is your shopping list. Find out what you can buy at the store.

Shopping List
Apples
Eggs
Bread

Student B

Here is the list of items you have in your store.

Talk to your customer. Make a list of items you don't have.

Store
Flour
Oranges
Bread
Eggs

Choosing a Grammar-Focused Task

DEVELOP GOALS

- What is the grammar **feature**?
- Is it an appropriate **level**?
- In what **context** is it used?

TASK DESIGN

- What **grammar, vocabulary**, and **strategies** to teach?
- What do learners have to do? **Outcomes**?
- Work alone, in pairs, or groups?

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

- How to ensure learners **participate**?
- When and how to give **instruction, directions, modeling, and feedback**?

Have you tried **collaborative tasks** in your classroom?

What strategies worked well for **managing your students**?

A Task-Based Lesson: Stages and Objectives

Stages	Objectives
Before the task	To prepare learners for the task
During the Task	To guide learners during the task
Post-task	To integrate learning

A Task-Based Lesson: Before the Task

Stages	Objectives	Teacher Role	Student Role
Before the task	To **prepare** learners for the task	• Teach vocabulary and grammar • Give background knowledge • Provide controlled practice (rehearsal)	Practice new knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs)

A Task-Based Lesson: During the Task

Stages	Objectives	Teacher Role	Student Role
During the Task	To **guide** learners during the task	• State the outcome • Model the activity • Give clear task directions • Give open practice (activation) • Correct errors	Use KSAs to complete task

# A Task-Based Lesson: Post-Task

Stages	Objectives	Teacher Role	Student Role
Post-task	To **integrate** learning	• Review the outcomes • Give additional feedback	• Report results • Reflect • Ask questions

A Task-Based Lesson: Review

Stages	Objectives	Teacher Role	Student Role
Before the task	To prepare learners for the task	Teach vocabulary, grammar, and background knowledge Give clear directions, model the activity, and state the outcome	Practice new knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs)
During the Task	To guide learners during the task	Provide controlled practice (rehearsal) Give open practice (activation) Give feedback/ Correct errors	Use KSAs to complete task
Post-task	To integrate learning	Review the outcomes Give additional feedback	Report results Reflect Ask questions
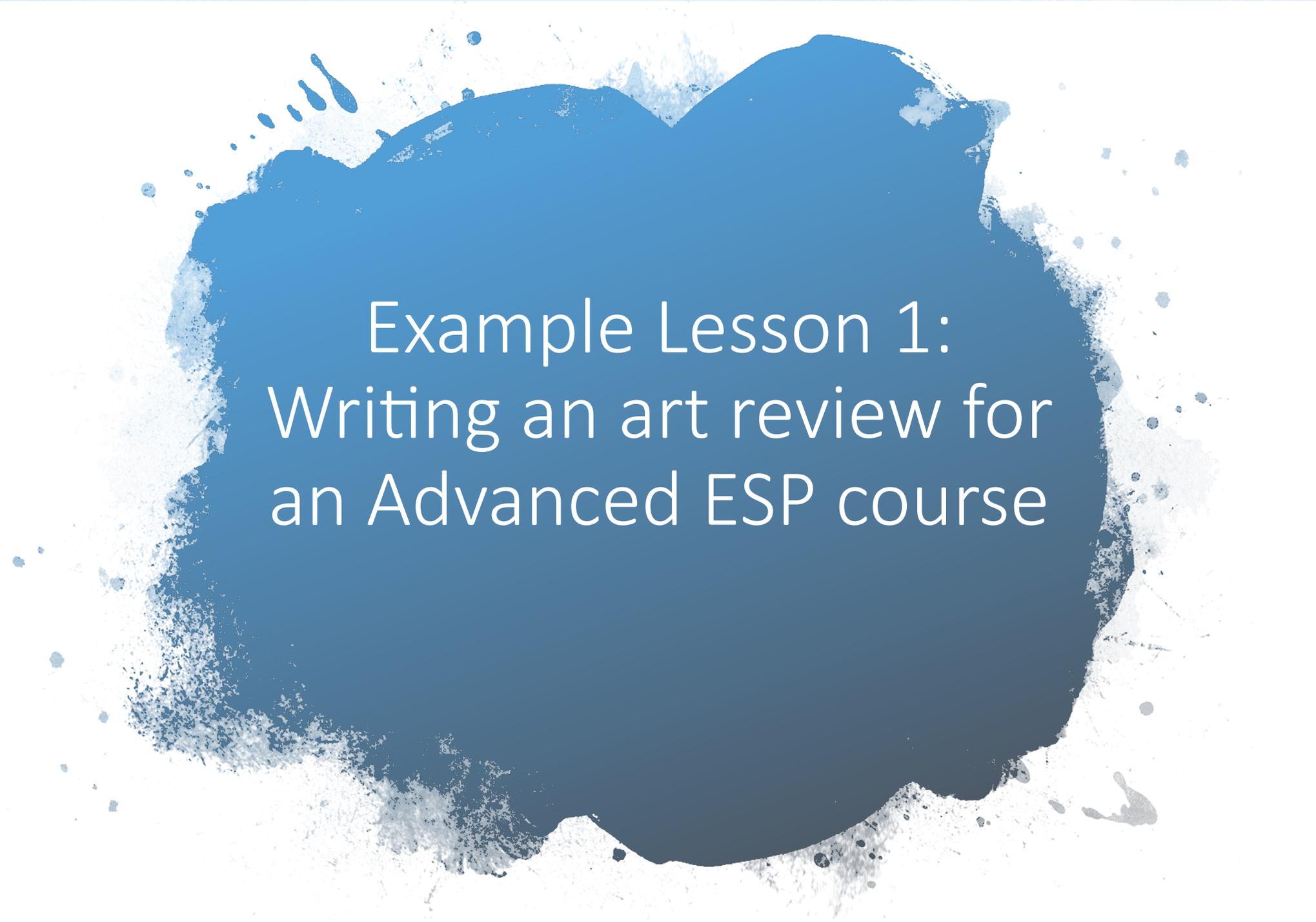
Example Lesson 1:
Writing an art review for
an Advanced ESP course

Writing a Review

Grammar: Using Adjectives, Comparatives, Equatives, and Superlatives

Level: Advanced; English for Specific Purposes (Art and Architecture)

Objective: To write a review of an artwork using descriptive and evaluative language to summarize, interpret, and critique from different perspectives

Activity 1: Sample Art Review

Questions to consider:

1. What is the purpose of the review?

2. What artwork is the review about?

3. What are the positive and negative critiques?

Summary	The exhibition features a well-made mask of a creature called a *Barong Ket* used in a Balinese ceremonial dance. It is made of wood and other natural materials from an unknown artist in Indonesia (*Barong Mask*, 1900 CE – 2010 CE).
Overall Impression	The Barong mask is typical of ceremonial art; however, the exhibition is problematic because of its separation from its original cultural meaning.
Positive Critique	
Negative Critique	

Activity 2: Using Evaluative Language

Frequently used adjectives to critique positively:

Useful	Clear
Important	Informative
Significant	Interesting

Frequently used adjectives to critique negatively:

Difficult	Unconvincing
Problematic	Uninteresting
Weak	Impossible

Summary	
Overall Impression	
Positive Critique	**On the one hand, the displayed mask provides viewers with an _informative_ look into Indonesian culture. Red and gold are common colors used to symbolize good luck in Asian art.**
Negative Critique	**Nevertheless, it is _impossible_ to understand its full meaning without watching the Indonesian ceremony because the reasons for the ritual offer greater beauty than the mask alone.**

Summary	The exhibition features a well-made mask of a creature called a *Barong Ket* used in a Balinese ceremonial dance. It is made of wood and other natural materials from an unknown artist in Indonesia (*Barong Mask*, 1900 CE – 2010 CE).
Overall Impression	The Barong mask exemplifies the most ceremonial art; however, the exhibition is problematic because of its separation from its original cultural meaning.
Positive Critique	On the one hand, the displayed mask provides viewers with an <u>informative</u> look into Indonesian culture. Red and gold are common colors used to symbolize good luck in Asian art.
Negative Critique	Nevertheless, it is <u>impossible</u> to understand its full meaning without watching the Indonesian ceremony because the reasons for the ritual offer greater beauty than the mask alone.

Activity 3: Comparatives, Superlatives, and Equatives

Comparatives - how similar or different (more/less...than)

Superlatives – noting the highest degree of comparison (most/least)

Equatives – similar or not similar (as...as, the same as, similar to)

Activity 3: Compare the buildings. Use Comparatives, Superlatives, and Equatives.

This Photo of the **modern Seagram Building** in New York by Unknown Author is licensed under CC BY-NC

This Photo of the **art deco Chrysler Building** in New York by Unknown Author is licensed under CC BY-SA

This Photo of the **gothic Jefferson Market Library** in New York by Unknown Author is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND

University ESP for Architecture Lesson: During the task

Stages	Activity	
During the Task **Objective: To support learners during the task**	Ss write a review of a building in groups (Each group has a different building) Ss use descriptive and evaluative language in their writing T collects collaborative writing from the task to give feedback (next class)	45 min

Task: Write a review of the building

Group Review Sample

The Seagram Building in New York is a steel-framed, glass skyscraper built by Miles De Rohe in 1958.

The skyscraper is **the most influential example** of modern functionalism in American architecture.

Some feel that the modern style is **not as striking as more elaborate** styles. Nevertheless, this style is **not well-understood**. Its **clean** lines show a **simple** beauty.

University ESP for Architecture: Task-Based Lesson

Stages	Activity	Time
Post-task **Objective: To integrate learning**	T discusses main problems and shows a review rubric.	15 min
	Ss read T's feedback and revise their reviews. Ss submit the final draft of their reviews.	30 min
	Ss prepare an oral review of the building Groups present their reviews to the class	45 min

Art Review: Group Checklist

Opening

❑ Introduce the artwork

❑ Describe the artwork

❑ Provide a thesis statement with your overall impression of the artwork

Body

❑ Provide positive and then negative critiques

❑ Use descriptive and evaluative language in critiques

Conclusion

❑ Review your opinions

❑ Provide a final thought about the artwork

How can this TBLT lesson be adapted for your own context?

Task Modifications

Mixed-level Classrooms:

- Simplify the grammar for some groups
- Use adjectives or comparatives only

Different Learners:

- Change the type of review (books, movies, games, products)

No Technology:

- Use reviews and/or pictures from magazines

Different Teaching Objectives:

- Change to a speaking task (e.g. a discussion comparing cell phones)
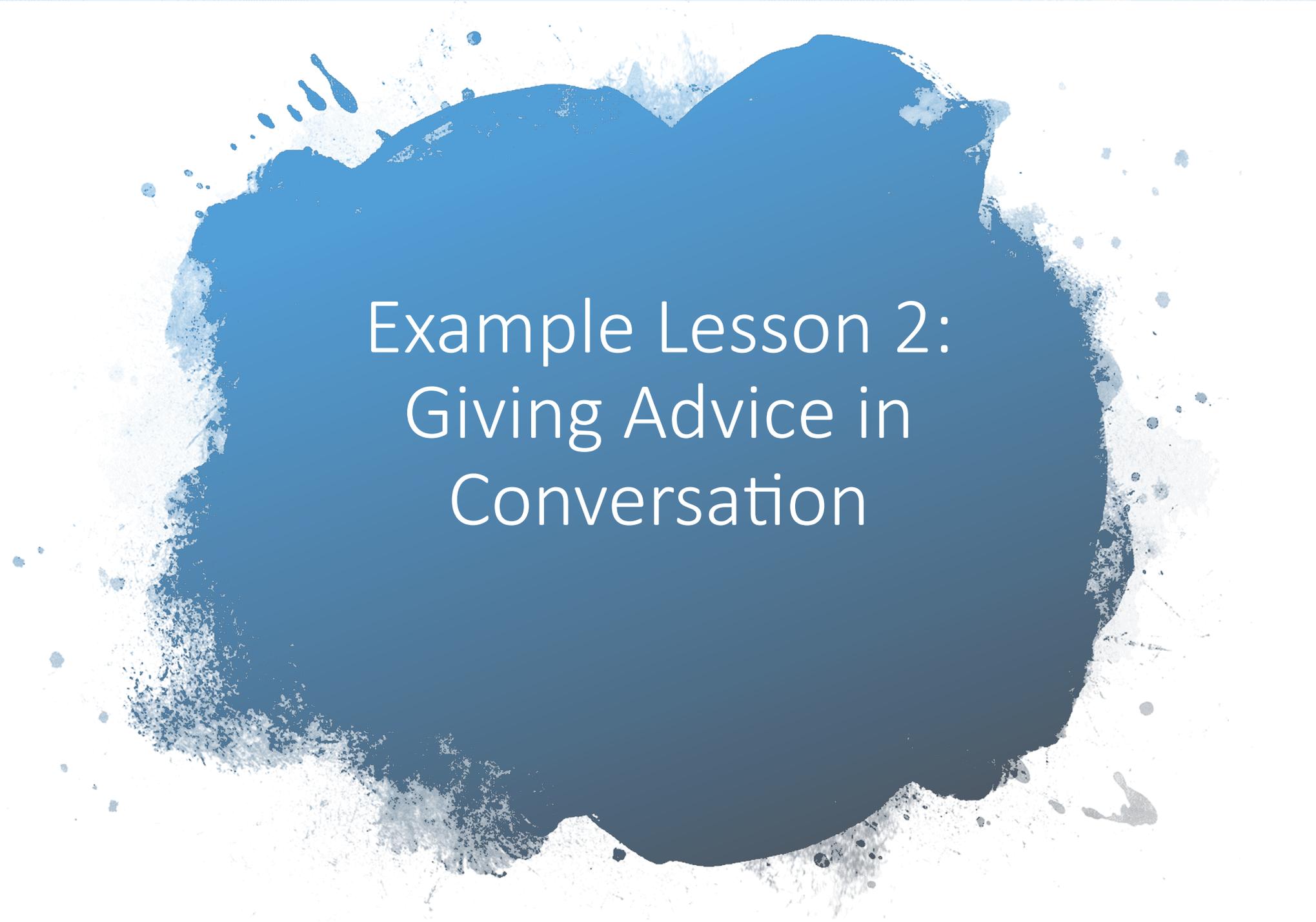
Example Lesson 2: Giving Advice in Conversation

Intermediate TBLT Lesson: Before the Task

Stages	Activity	Time
Before the task	**Activity 3:** Ss practice difficult situations with a partner and ask for advice. Then, Ss switch and give advice to a partner. Ideas: Studying for a test Fighting with a friend Eating healthier	20 min

Intermediate TBLT Lesson: During the Task

Stages	Activity	Time
During the Task	Ss role play giving advice in pairs using cards	30 min

	Partner's name	What advice?
Problem: You are upset because a friend is too competitive when you play games. **Directions:** 1. Read your card to find out your problem. 2. Ask 3 people for advice. 3. Write the advice in the chart. 4. Give advice for your friends' problems.	Partner 1:	
	Partner 2:	
	Partner 3:	

Task-Based Lesson for Intermediate School-Aged Learners

Stages	Activities	Time
Post-task	Ss share their partners' advice T gives feedback and corrects errors as students read the advice	20 min

How can this TBLT lesson be adapted for your own context?

Task Modifications

- Mixed Level Classrooms:
  - Increase the grammar level for some groups
  - Use modals and conditionals

- Different Learners:
  - Change the context for giving advice (parent-child, boss-employee)

- With Technology:
  - Record the students' role plays for self-review

- Different Teaching Objectives:
  - Change to a writing task (e.g. answering letters to the newspaper)
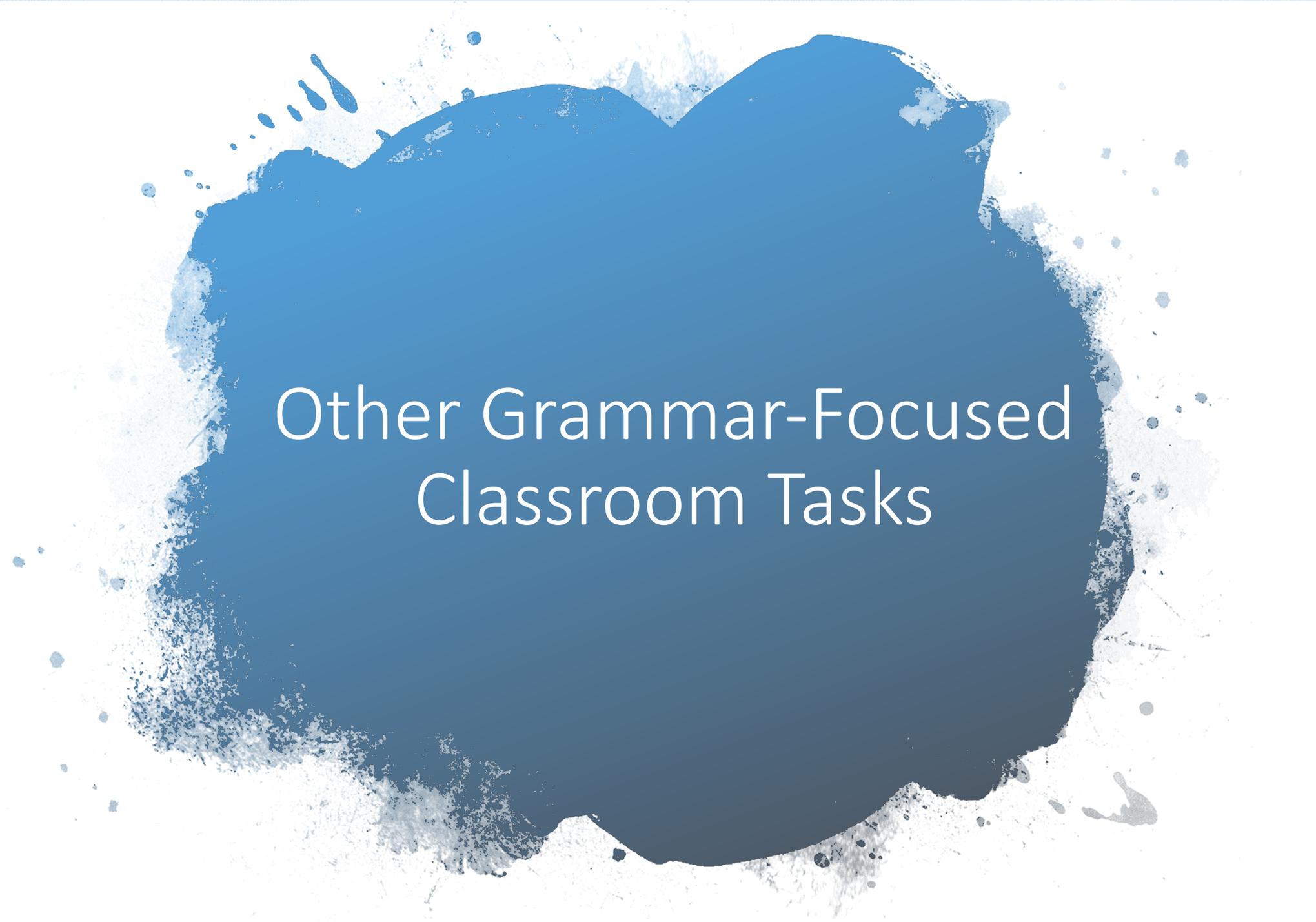
Other Grammar-Focused Classroom Tasks

Some Activities for Grammar-Focused Tasks

Information gap	• Learners share info
Reasoning gap	• Learners make decisions or solve problems
Opinion gap	• Learners share preferences and give opinions
Dialogues / Role plays	• Learners simulate real conversations

What tasks have you used to teach grammar features?

Information Gap Activity for Decision Making

Grammar: Information Questions

Level: Beginning; Grade 6 +

Objective: To ask and answer information questions in order to decide on a movie

DIRECTIONS:

1. You and your partner want to go to a movie tomorrow night, but you need to decide which one.

2. Read the information about your movie choices.

3. Ask and answer questions to decide which movie to go to.

Information Gap Activity for Decision Making

Questions to consider:
1. **What movie do you want to see?**
2. **What is … about?**
3. **When does … start?**

Student A
Movie: Romeo and Juliet (PG)
Genre: Tragedy/ Drama
Two youngsters fall in love, but their families are feuding. What can they do?

Showtimes: 12 noon; 7:30 pm; 9 pm
Price: Adults $12 Children $8

Student B
Movie: Spy Kids (PG)
Genre: Adventure Comedy
Two young siblings become spies to rescue their parents. Will they save them?

Showtimes: 2 pm; 8 pm; 11 pm
Price: Adults, $15 Children $12

Role-Play Activity: Problem Solving Task

Grammar: too, not enough + adjectives; requests

Level: Advanced, High School or College

Objective: To discuss a problem with a hotel room and negotiate a solution

DIRECTIONS:

1. Look at the information on your role card and talk to your partner.

2. Find a solution to the problem.

3. Present your dialogue to the class.

Role-Play Activity: Problem Solving Task

Role A:
You are a guest staying at a hotel. The website says it is a luxury hotel, but the sheets and towels are dirty, the bathroom is too small, and … (you decide).
You want to change to a better room, and you want a discount.

Role B:
You are a hotel receptionist. There is a guest staying at the hotel who complains about everything, even when there isn't a problem.

You can move a guest to a different room, but you can't change the price of a room.

How can you modify these tasks for your learners and your contexts?

Quick Review

Review: True or False?

1. **In TBLT, language is a set of rules.**
2. **A classroom task is related to a real-world activity a learner might have to do using language to achieve an outcome**
3. **When planning a task, a teacher should consider classroom management.**
4. **TBLT lessons have four stages.**

1. False. Language is what we use to create meaning and communicate.
2. True.
3. True.
4. False. TBLT lessons have 3 stages: before, during and after the task.

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Thank you!

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Reflection and Discussion Questions

1. How do you plan on using the information and strategies surrounding TBLT learned today in your classroom?

2. Consider the grammar structures you are teaching. What contextually relevant, real-world tasks might you have your students practice?

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