

Warm-up

1. Interview

Interview your partner and find out what he or she did last night.

2. At what age?

Write down at what age you think a person typically does each of the following activities.

1. A person graduates from college at the age of _____.
2. A person gets married at the age of _____.
3. A person has a first child at the age of _____.
4. A person dies at the age of _____.

Interview your partner. Ask him or her questions to find out how they answered each item. Jot down next to your answers above what your partner says.

Model: At what age does a person graduate from college?

Listen as your teacher leads a discussion on your answers.

Self-assessment 1



For each of the “I” statements below, indicate which applies to you:

	YES, FOR SURE!	SORT OF.	NOPE.
1. I can state the difference between an Exercise, an Activity, and a Task.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. I can identify a Task when I see one.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. I understand the difference between an input-oriented Task and an output-oriented Task.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. I can state the difference between Tasks as drop-ins and Tasks as the goals of units.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. I understand what it means to determine what students need to know and what they need to be able to do in order to be successful with a task.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Definitions of tasks

Table 1 Definitions of ‘task’ as language learning goals

Author	Definition
Long (1985)	A piece of work undertaken for oneself or for others, freely or for some reward. Thus examples of tasks include painting a fence, dressing a child, filling out a form In other words, by ‘task’ is meant the hundred and one things people do in everyday life, at work, at play, and in between. ‘Tasks’ are the things people will tell you they do if you ask them and they are not applied linguists.
Crookes (1986)	A piece of work or activity, usually with a specified objective, undertaken as part of an educational course, at work, or used to elicit data for research.
Carroll (1993)	Any activity in which a person engages, given an appropriate setting, in order to achieve a specifiable class of objectives.
Bachman & Palmer (1996)	An activity that involves individuals in using language for the purpose of achieving a particular goal or objective in a particular situation.
Bygate <i>et al.</i> (2001)	An activity which requires learners to use language, with emphasis on meaning, to attain an objective.

Van den Branden, 2006, p. 4

Table 2 Definitions of 'task' as an educational activity

Author	Definition
Richards, Platt & Weber (1985)	An activity or action which is carried out as the result of processing or understanding language i.e. as a response. For example, drawing a map while listening to a tape, and listening to an instruction and performing a command, may be referred to as tasks. Tasks may or may not involve the production of language. A task usually requires the teacher to specify what will be regarded as successful completion of the task. The use of a variety of different kinds of tasks in language teaching is said to make teaching more communicative ... since it provides a purpose for classroom activity which goes beyond practice of language for its own sake.
Krahnke (1987)	The defining characteristic of task-based content is that it uses activities that the learners have to do for non-instructional purposes outside the classroom as opportunities for language learning. Tasks are distinct from other activities to the degree that they have non-instructional purposes.
Breen (1987)	Any structured language learning endeavour which has a particular objective, appropriate content, a specified working procedure, and a range of outcomes for those who undertake the task. 'Task' is therefore assumed to refer to a range of workplans which have the overall purpose of facilitating language learning from the simple and brief exercise type, to more complex and lengthy activities such as group problem-solving or simulations and decision-making.
Prabhu (1987)	An activity which required learners to arrive at an outcome from given information through some process of thought and which allowed teachers to control and regulate that process was regarded as a task.
Candlin (1987)	One of a set of differentiated, sequencable, problem-posing activities involving learners' cognitive and communicative procedures applied to existing and new knowledge in the collective exploration and pursuance of foreseen or emergent goals within a social milieu.
Nunan (1989)	A piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is primarily focused on meaning rather than form.

Willis (1996)	Activities where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose (goal) in order to achieve an outcome.
Skehan (1998)	An activity in which: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● meaning is primary ● there is some communication problem to solve ● there is some sort of relationship to comparable real-world activities ● task completion has some priority ● the assessment of the task is in terms of outcome.
Lee (2000)	(1) A classroom activity or exercise that has: (a) an objective obtainable only by the interaction among participants, (b) a mechanism for structuring and sequencing interaction, and (c) a focus on meaning exchange; (2) a language learning endeavor that requires learners to comprehend, manipulate, and/or produce the target language as they perform some set of workplans.
Bygate <i>et al.</i> (2001)	An activity, susceptible to brief or extended pedagogic intervention, which requires learners to use language, with emphasis on meaning, to attain an objective.
Bygate <i>et al.</i> (2001)	An activity, influenced by learner choice, and susceptible to learner reinterpretation, which requires learners to use language, with emphasis on meaning, to attain an objective.
Ellis (2003)	A workplan that requires learners to process language pragmatically in order to achieve an outcome that can be evaluated in terms of whether the correct or appropriate prepositional content has been conveyed. To this end, it requires them to give primary attention to meaning and to make use of their own linguistic resources, although the design of the task may predispose them to choose particular forms. A task is intended to result in language use that bears a resemblance, direct or indirect, to the way language is used in the real world. Like other language activities, a task can engage productive or receptive, and oral or written skills, and also various cognitive processes.

Van den Branden, 2006, pp. 7-8

Structuring principles for task-based language teaching (Nunan, 2004)

1. Scaffolding
 - a. Lessons and materials should provide supporting frameworks within which the learning takes place.
2. Task dependency
 - a. Within a lesson, one task should grow out of, and build upon, the ones that have gone before.
3. Recycling
 - a. Recycling language maximizes opportunities for learning and activates the 'organic' learning principle.
4. Active learning
 - a. Learners learn best by actively using the language they are learning.
5. Integration
 - a. Learners should be taught in ways that make clear the relationships between linguistic form, communicative function, and semantic meaning.
6. Reproduction to creation
 - a. Learners should be encouraged to move from reproductive to creative language use.
7. Reflection
 - a. Learners should be given opportunities to reflect on what they have learned and how well they are doing.

Benefits of task-based learning (Ellis, 2009)

- Tasks can promote meaning negotiation
 - Interaction Hypothesis: Claims that second language acquisition is facilitated by the opportunity to negotiate meaning in conjunction with comprehensible input (Long, 1996)
 - Pushed Output Hypothesis: Claims that output helps learners notice gaps in their linguistic abilities and revise their output thereby engaging in language acquisition (Swain, 1985)
- Tasks can impact learner production
 - Cognitive approach: Certain tasks can prompt students to emphasize accuracy, fluency, or complexity (Skehan, 1998)
- Tasks can help students improve their L2 performance
 - Theory of communicative effectiveness (Yule, 1997): Certain tasks require different kinds of learner performance
- Tasks support L2 acquisition because they promote interaction between learners
 - Socio-cultural theory: Learning arise in interaction with others (Lantolf, 1994)
- Tasks help students acquire the second language and gain communicative effectiveness
 - Tasks help learners use language purposefully and cooperatively
 - Tasks allow learners to try different communication strategies
 - Tasks give learners confidence that they can achieve communicative goals

Self-assessment 2



For each of the “I” statements below, indicate which applies to you:

	YES, FOR SURE!	SORT OF.	NOPE.
1. I can state the difference between an Exercise, an Activity, and a Task.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. I can identify a Task when I see one.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. I understand the difference between an input-oriented Task and an output-oriented Task.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. I can state the difference between Tasks as drop-ins and Tasks as the goals of units.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. I understand what it means to determine what students need to know and what they need to be able to do in order to be successful with a task.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Definition of task in the language classroom

Tasks are the quintessential communicative event in contemporary language teaching.

- Tasks involve the expression and interpretation of meaning.
- Tasks have a purpose that is not language practice.

VanPatten, 2017, p. 80

Project-based task examples

- Creating a pamphlet
- Creating a Wikipedia page
- Scripting and filming a documentary
- Creating a collage
- Conducting a survey/an experiment
- Writing lyrics to music

(See VanPatten, 2017, p. 89 for more details)

Micro-level practice

	EXPRESSION AND INTERPRETATION OF MEANING?	COMMUNICATIVE PURPOSE?	SUMMARY STATEMENT
Exercise	No	No	Not Communicative
Activity	Yes	No	Partially Communicative
Task	Yes	Yes	Fully Communicative

1. By level (lower level / upper level)

Lower levels:

1. Look at the table of contents of your textbooks. How are they structured? What similarities/differences are there?
2. Select one common chapter/topic/lesson and examine it. Using VanPatten's characteristics of Exercises, Activities, and Tasks, can you identify the types of things the textbook asks students to do? What is the relative ratio of Exercises to Activities to Tasks for that chapter/topic/lesson?
3. How would you revise Exercises and Activities to turn them into Tasks?
4. Think about your goals for your students and devise tasks/projects around them.
 - Try to imagine a textbook organized around Tasks instead of the traditional grammatical syllabus and vocabulary groups.
How difficult is it for you to imagine such a thing? If it is difficult, why?

Upper levels:

1. Select one common topic/unit/theme and examine it. Using VanPatten's characteristics of Exercises, Activities, and Tasks, can you identify the types of things the textbook asks students to do? What is the relative ratio of Exercises to Activities to Tasks for that topic/unit/theme?
2. How would you revise Exercises and Activities to make them task-based?
3. Think about your goals for your students and devise tasks/projects around them.
 - How can you integrate language and content in projects?
 - What tasks promote proficiency-based learning in your levels?

2. By language

1. How can you create Tasks that integrate culture?

2. Select one of the Tasks described in VanPatten's chapter and adapt it for your language. Then analyze what students need to know and know how to do to perform that Task. Finally, see if you can find a "natural spot" in a textbook/syllabus for the language you are working with to drop it in (assuming that text does not already contain a Task in that spot).

3. Imagine using Tasks to assess students throughout the curriculum instead of traditional tests. Review the following rating guide for assessing students on the task, and discuss with your colleagues how you might apply the guide.
 - What questions do you have about the rating guide?
 - Are you worried about "grammar" and "accuracy"?
 - What makes doing a Task successful?
 - How does our definition of "communication" inform how we develop and make use of rubrics and guides for assessing Task performance?

Task Performance Rating Guide

2 points: The student can perform the Task with relative ease.

1 point: The student can perform the Task, but has occasional difficulty, or struggles at times during the Task.

0 points: The student could not perform the task, or struggled so much as to demonstrate basic inability.

4. Think about the sequence of classes in your language and how to articulate from one level to the next. How can tasks assist with articulation?

Next steps

1. Curricular goals

Establish curricular goals for the department and individual language programs.

- Consider what students should be able to do at exit points from the program.
- Consider different skill areas.
- Consider how you would measure performance and assess proficiency at exit points.

MSU program goals

French and Spanish

- 50% of students exiting French 202 (fourth semester) are at the Intermediate-mid level of oral proficiency (on the ACTFL scale);
- 50% of students completing a minor are at the Intermediate-high level of oral proficiency;
- 50% of students completing a major are at the Advanced-mid level of oral proficiency.

Chinese (ACTFL/HSK scale)

- 1st year - target NH; HSK II
- 2nd year- target IL; HSK III
- 3rd year - target IM; HSK IV
- 4th year - target IH-AL; HSK V

Russian

- Speaking Russian at the Novice-high level by end of first-year Russian;
- Speaking at the Intermediate-low level by the end of second year;
- Speaking at the Intermediate-mid level after three to four years of language study.

German

- Intermediate knowledge at the end of second year
- Advanced knowledge for minors and majors

Michigan Department of Education requirement for teacher education candidates:

- French, German, Italian, Latin, or Spanish: Advanced-Low
- Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, or Russian: Intermediate-High

2. Tasks and assessments throughout the curriculum

Examine your language program's curriculum.

- How you would measure performance and assess proficiency throughout the curriculum?
- Select one semester or year and focus on the lessons in its textbook/materials. Develop five to six Tasks that can be used as performance assessments at key points during the semester or year.

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Additional online resources

- ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines
<https://www.actfl.org/publications/guidelines-and-manuals/actfl-proficiency-guidelines-2012>
- ACTFL Performance Descriptors
<https://www.actfl.org/publications/guidelines-and-manuals/actfl-performance-descriptors-language-learners>
- NCSSFL/ACTFL Can-Do Statements
<https://www.actfl.org/publications/guidelines-and-manuals/ncssfl-actfl-can-do-statements>
- History and theory of task-based instruction (Brigham Young University Humanities Learning Resources)
<http://hlr.byu.edu/methods/content/task-based.html>
- Task based language teaching (Move Language Ahead blog)
<http://www.mlaworld.com/blog/task-based-language-teaching-the-mla-approach/>
- Can-do statements for a basic language program (Bill VanPatten & Walter P. Hopkins; CLEAR Newsletter Fall 2015)
https://clear.msu.edu/files/5714/4467/5941/CLEAR_Fall_15_Final.pdf
- Are some languages really more difficult to learn? Maybe, maybe not. (Charlene Polio; CLEAR Newsletter Fall 2016)
https://clear.msu.edu/files/1414/7826/4754/CLEAR_News_Winter_16_FINAL_w_links.pdf
- Project-based language learning: In pursuit of authentic connections (Stephen L. Tschudi & Julio C. Rodriguez; CLEAR Newsletter Fall 2017)
https://clear.msu.edu/files/6715/0756/2981/CLEAR_News_Fall_17_final.pdf
- Episodes 42 and 71 of Tea with BVP on tasks
<http://www.teawithbvp.com/#listen-section>