# WAYS TO DEVELOP LANGUAGE AND SKILLS BY PRACTICE ACTIVITIES AND TASKS

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**Annotation**

The article discusses the ways to develop language and skills which are considered the basis of learning foreign languages. It also highlights the role of tasks and activities related to language skills used in the learning process and provides tips for choosing them.

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These are activities and tasks designed to give learners opportunities to practice and extend their use of language, such as new vocabulary, functional exponents or grammatical structures, or of the subskills of reading, listening, speaking or writing. There are many different kinds of activities and tasks with different names and different uses.

We can see that these activities give learners an opportunity to use language, but in different ways.

| Activity 1 | Activity 2 | Activity 3 |
|---|---|---|
| Is a controlled/restricted practice activity (the practice activity (an activity gives students practice in is a less controlled/freer Is a free activity leaders can only use certain items of language) gives students practice in using language accurately gives students practice in is an exercise. Le it focuses on the form of language | In which learners have some communicating is a task choice over what language they use) using language accurately and in communicating is a task (an activity with a real-world outcome) | is a task choice over what language they use) using language accurately and in communicating is a task |

Speaking and writing activities can be categorised according to how much they control students use of language. Each category of activity has a different focus and purpose and uses different activity types. Controlled activities give students repeated practice in accuracy and the form of language, and allow

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them to make few mistakes. They are mostly used to guide students in using the form of target language. Some examples of controlled activities are copying words or sentences, jazz chants, and drills (guided repetition). In drills students can either repeat some model language as a class (choral drills) or as individuals (individual drills), replace a key word in given sentences (substitution drills) or use new words to create sentences with a different structure (transformation drills).

Free activities, by contrast, allow students to use whatever language they wish in order to complete a task. In free activities, the teacher may not be able to predict what language the students will use, and so can't use these activities to give practice in specific language. These activities focus on fluency, giving students practice in recalling and joining together the language they know and giving them opportunities to try to interact and communicate. Discussions, problem-solving activities, sharing or comparing ideas, information or experiences: rank ordering / prioritising (putting a list of things in order of importance), writing emails, stories, letters, invitations or compositions are all examples of free activities.

Between controlled and free activities are freer activities in which the teacher can predict to some extent what language the student will need to use. For example, you can see that in activity 2 above the students will need to use question forms, so the activity provides practice of question forms. But the students will also use other language which is not so predictable to complete the email. These activities provide repeated practice of target language, guiding students to use its form correctly and integrate new language with language students already know. Examples of freer activities are role-plays, Information-gap activities, and sentence completion. Gap-fills, surveys.

We can see that controlled activities give students lots of guidance and support in using language accurately, freer activities give a little less guidance and support, and free activities do not give students guidance and support in the language they use.

It is not always possible to categorise activities as controlled. freer or free as it depends on how the teacher uses them. Let's take role-play, for example. A teacher could put students in pairs and ask them to reproduce a dialogue they have just heard on a recording. This would be a controlled activity. At the end of a lesson on asking for and giving personal information, students could do a role-play in which they meet a new person at a party and have to find out about them. As the students would be very likely to use the language they had just learnt, this would be a freer activity Imagine now a reading text which discusses the advantages and disadvantages of social networking websites. After the students have done language and comprehension works on the text, the teacher asks one group of students to list ideas in favour of social networking sites and the other group to list all the arguments against. The teacher then pairs students from the different groups and asks them to argue in their roles about the advantages and disadvantages.

When selecting activities for practicing and developing language it is up to the teacher to decide whether to do a controlled practice, freer practice or free activity, or an activity that focuses on accuracy or on communication. The choice will depend on students' needs and preferences.

➢ When choosing activities and tasks for developing skills, the teacher can decide which skill or subskill to focus on. Again, students' needs and preferences should help us to make that choice.

➢ Using several kinds of activities in our lessons adds variety. This helps to keep lessons more interesting and motivating.

➢ Activities in lessons are usually linked so that the first one leads into and helps the next, etc. There are several different ways of linking activities in lessons. These are just some of them.

Warmer and/or lead-in comprehension activities/tasks post-task activities. Comprehension activities for listening or reading often start by focusing on more general levels of comprehension, then move on to subskills involving detailed or specific attention to the text, then to a focus on the language used in the

text.

Example 1: A listening skills lesson Lead-in: discussing the topic of the listening and learning any important new vocabulary comprehension tasks: listening to the recorded conversation and answering multiple-choice gist questions about it → listening to the conversation again and completing a form with specific information post-task activities: brief discussion of the topic of the conversation

Example 2: A topic-based skills lesson Lead-in: speaking about the topic and doing related language work tasks: listening to a recording about the topic reading a text about the topic post-task activities: discussing the topic and/or focusing on the language of the topic writing a composition about the topic.

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