

# Task-based Learning: Creating Relevant Lessons

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## Introduction

This essay presents three tasks designed using Nunan's format as shown in *Aspects of Task-Based Syllabus Design* (2001) and concepts found in his *Designing Tasks for the Communicative Classroom* (1989). Each of the tasks was chosen for its 'authenticity' – a conversation or activity the targeted students would be able to use outside of the classroom. Both rehearsal and activation tasks were created to develop communication skills used in carrying out the task in the 'real world' and to attain information needed in the lesson. Required and useful language was chosen, then language exercises and communication activities were written to give the students these enabling skills. Finally, these tasks, activities and exercises were arranged and consolidated in a way to best prepare the students for each stage of the lesson and the final task. The three task-based lessons are each presented with the targeted students described and the lesson steps illustrated – the longer exercises and supplementary materials placed in the appendices for easier reference.

## Task 1

The following lesson plan was written to prepare pre-intermediate Japanese students between the ages of 18 and 30 for the target task of filling out an immigration form (an Australian Working Holiday visa). These students would be studying English in preparation for work or study abroad.

Figure 1 shows an activation task that is "designed to activate the acquisition process" (Internet 1) by having the students share background information about the subject. It activates and/or provides schemata (background knowledge used by a reader to comprehend and recollect a text) (Bartlett 1932) thus insuring better comprehension and learning throughout the lesson. Figure 2, another task, is a rehearsal task where the students practice how to obtain information from the form quickly and accurately.

**Figure 1**

<u>Warm-up</u>
With a partner, discuss the following then share your answers with the rest of the class.
1. What are Working Holiday visas?
2. Have you, or anyone you know, ever used a Working Holiday visa? If so, where?
3. List information you think the visa application asks for (i.e. first name, age, etc.).

**Figure 2**

<u>Lead-in</u>
The teacher will give you the first two pages of the application instructions. You have one minute to scan for the answers to the following questions. Compare your answers with a partner then share with the class.
1. Can a 32 year old apply for the visa?
2. Do you need a return ticket?
3. For how long is the visa valid?
4. Where can a Japanese person get more information?

The students then gain enabling skills through the language exercise in Appendix A. Necessary vocabulary for comprehension is learned and examples are given in context. Figure 3 shows a communication activity that introduces the form's questions and teaches the students how to answer through dialogue. Finally, the students perform a rehearsal task (Figure 4) by actually completing part of a real immigration form (see Internet 2).

## Task 2

This task, designed for upper-intermediate Japanese students preparing for work/study overseas, allows practice for reading and telephoning skills needed in searching for accommodation. Appendix B shows an activation task that focuses the students on the final task and alerts them to cultural differences that may arise. Enabling skills such as vocabulary and abbreviations specific to this task are taught in the exercise in Appendix C. Figure 5, also teaching enabling skills, is a language exercise using the new vocabulary to understand and make a decision from the text. It is also a rehearsal task preparing them for an activity they will perform outside of class. Since "Classroom activities should parallel the 'real world' as closely

**Figure 3**

<u>Exercise 2</u>	
In pairs, ask each other the following questions. Answer in complete sentences.	
Student A	Student B
1. What is your family name?	1. What is your given name?
2. Have you been known by any other names? For example, before you were married?	2. What is your marital status?
3. What is your occupation?	3. Do you have any qualifications (i.e. a teaching degree)?
4. Have you been granted a Working Holiday visa to Australia before?	4. What type of employment do you intend to seek?

**Figure 4**

<u>Activity</u>
Fill out the sample Australian Working Holiday visa application the teacher hands out. When you are finished, exchange forms with a partner and check each other's work.

**Figure 5** (the classified ads are shown in Appendix D)

In pairs, imagine that you are moving to Vancouver, Canada together to study English for a year. You and your partner each have \$500 a month to spend on rent. Look at the classified ads the teacher gives you and discuss which three apartments you would like to consider.
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as possible" (Clarke and Silberstein 1977:51), real text from classified ads (see Appendix D) is used in this activity. The dialogues in Figure 6 and Appendix E are rehearsal tasks designed to practice the learned language in a situation resembling a real one.

### Task 3

This task teaches intermediate students how to give directions to English-speaking tourists in Tokyo's subway. It begins with an activation task (Figure 7) that gets the students thinking about directional language and demonstrates their limitations.

**Figure 6**

With a partner, use the role play cards and practice making a phone call about an apartment. Take turns being the landlord and student.

*Student's cards:*

*Landlord's cards:*

How long is the lease?	The lease is for one year.
How many bedrooms are there?	It has one bedroom.
How much is the rent?	The rent is \$800 a month.
Is hot water included?	Heat and cable TV are included.
Is there parking?	There is not any parking.
Is the apartment carpeted?	It is fully carpeted.
When is it available?	It is available from August 1st.
Is it furnished?	There is a refrigerator and a sofa.

**Figure 7**

Giving Train Directions to Foreign Tourists in Tokyo

In pairs, give your partner instructions on how to get from your home station to the school's nearest station or to the airport.

Did your partner understand? What was difficult about explaining directions? Share with the class.

Nunan (Internet 1) says EFL students need to use "authentic AND non-authentic data [because] both provide learners with different aspects of the language". Consequently the language task in Appendix F uses a "non-authentic" conversation to give the students a basic foundation from which they can build a more natural one. The rehearsal task in Figure 8 uses more authentic discussion to prepare the students for the 'real world' where conversations rarely follow textbook examples. This teaches them to listen for specific information without having to understand every word.

Figure 9 is a rehearsal as well, practicing the conversation without the help of a written dialogue. This allows freer conversation, shows the students how much they have improved since the first exercise (Figure 7) and clarifies where they are still lacking in skills and vocabulary. The "Challenge" presented at the end of the lesson (Figure 10) encourages the

**Figure 8** (see model tape script Appendix G)

<u>Listening</u>
Listen to the conversation between an American tourist and a Japanese businessman. Don't worry if you can't understand every word; just listen for the answers to the following questions.
1. Where are they?
2. Where does the tourist want to go?
3. What train lines does the businessman suggest he take?
4. Does the tourist understand?

**Figure 9**

With a partner, use a Tokyo subway map and the cues below to ask for and give directions.

Akasaka to Nishi-Magome	Nakano to Asakusa
Omotesando to Shinjuku	Ochanomizu to Iidabashi

**Figure 10**

<u>Challenge</u>
After class or on your day off, go to an area of Tokyo where there are a lot of foreign tourists (i.e. Harajuku or Asakusa). Ask several if they need any help with directions. Report your experience to the class next week!

use of learned language in a real situation and will hopefully consolidate skills, build confidence and prove the value of the lesson.

### Conclusion

"Adults need to be able to see the immediate relevance of what they do in the classroom to what they need to do outside it, and real-life reading matter treated realistically makes the connection obvious." (Brosnan *et al* 1984: 2-3)

All three tasks presented in this paper use not only 'real-life reading matter', but also listening, dialogue and vocabulary that have applicability for the students outside of the classroom. The following steps for designing

task-based lessons according to Nunan (1989) were followed: 1) selecting real world/target tasks; 2) composing rehearsal and activation pedagogical tasks; 3) identifying enabling skills and writing communicative activities and language exercises for them; 4) ordering and synthesizing the tasks, activities and exercises. The result is effective for the students who need specific preparation for using English in the real world. Especially in situations where students are studying in their native country and have little exposure to 'real' English, task-based language programs, as demonstrated in this paper, will hopefully continue to develop in the EFL classroom.

### **Bibliography**

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- Clarke, M. and Silberstein, S. (1977). Toward a realization of psycholinguistic principles in the ESL reading class. In *Language Learning*, 27 (1), 48-65.
- Nunan, D. (1989). *Designing Tasks for the Communicative Classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

### **Internet**

- 1- <http://www3.telus.net/linguisticsissues/syllabusdesign.html>
- 2- <http://www.immi.gov.au/allforms/pdf/1150.pdf>
- 3- [http://homes.canada.com/vancouver/results.aspx?category\\_id=3134&keywords=&keyoper=ANY&max=&min=&bedrooms=&cls\\_id=37819](http://homes.canada.com/vancouver/results.aspx?category_id=3134&keywords=&keyoper=ANY&max=&min=&bedrooms=&cls_id=37819)

## Appendices

### Appendix A: Task 1 Exercise 1

#### Exercise 1

In groups of three, match the phrases and words on the left with the best sentence on the right. Look at the first example. Check your answers with another group.

marital status <u>C</u>	A. I don't have a fax so contact me by email.
passport expiry date _____	B. I have 500,000 yen in my bank account.
current residential address _____	C. I am single.
facsimile number _____	D. I plan to go to Australia on April 1st, 2004.
dependent children _____	E. I currently live at 2-2 Nakano, Tokyo, Japan.
date of proposed travel _____	F. I will need a new passport after April 1st, 2013.
evidence of sufficient funds _____	G. I don't have any children.

**Appendix B: Task 2 Warm-up***Warm-up*

Answer the following questions with a partner then share your answers with the rest of the class.

1. Have you ever looked for an apartment before? Describe the experience.
2. What information do you need to know about an apartment before you go look at it (i.e. rent, location, etc.)?
3. What might be the differences apartments in Japan and in Canada? Look at the examples and make your list below.

Japan	Canada
You must pay key money and a deposit.	You don't have to pay key money but probably a deposit.
There are usually straw mat floors.	The floors...



**Appendix C: Task 2 Vocabulary***Vocabulary*

When apartments are advertised in newspapers and magazines, many abbreviations are used. In small groups, race to match the abbreviations on the left with the words and phrases on the right.

avail. Apr. 15	two bedrooms
Frdg/stv	fireplace
f/place	including
\$1095 neg.	The apartment is available from the middle of April.
2 BR	There is a great view of the ocean.
Reno'd	a place to put your car
w/ lovely wtr. views	There is a refrigerator and a stove.
30 mins to dwntrwn	smoking and pets are NOT allowed
incl.	The heating and hot water bills are included in the rent.
Ns/Np	It takes thirty minutes to get from the apartment to the center of town.
prkg.	cleaned, repaired, renovated
heat/hw incl.	The rent can be discussed, changed or negotiated.

**Appendix D: Task 2 Classified Ads (Adapted from Internet 3 )**

**North Vancouver** 1BR Reno'd \$760 Large, 222-4444 / 222-0000

**North Vancouver**

FULLY FURNISHED Deep Cove 1BR w/lovely wtr views, f/place, TV/VCR, kitchenette, 30 mins to dwntwn incl cable/heat \$1250/neg 604-222-6666

**North Vancouver**

Near Amiens, 2BR avail Apr 15, ht/hw incl'd. 222-1111

**North Vancouver**

NR LONSDALE lg 2 BR \$830. May 1. Incl ht & hw, prkg. N/S. N/P 222-9999 or 222-8888

**North Vancouver**

SPECIAL (N. Van) Fully carpeted, large 2BR. Frdg/stv, N/p. 240 E 4th St, \$700. 222-7777

**North Vancouver**

2BR at Woodcroft, 2020 Fullerton private setting, Ns/Np, \$1095 neg. Westhall 222-3333

**North Vancouver**

HI-RISE Central Lonsdale Bachelor, avail. May 1, heat/hw incl. No Pets. \$675. 222-5555

**Appendix E: Task 2 Dialogue**

With your partner practice the dialogue below. Then switch roles and try it again. Substitute the cues at the bottom and take turns. With cue C, try it without looking at the dialogue!

S= student L= landlord

(phone rings)

L: Hello?

S: Hello. I'm calling about the apartment listed in the paper.

L: Yes?

S: How long is the lease?

L: It's for 1. six months .

S: 2. Are utilities included in the rent?

L: Only the heat is included.

S: Is there 3. a refrigerator ?

L: Yes, and it comes with a TV and VCR as well.

S: May I take a look at it?

L: Sure, how about 4. 4:00 this afternoon ?

S: 5. That's fine . Where shall we meet?

Cues		
A	B	C
1. <i>six months</i>	1. <i>one year</i>	1. <i>eighteen months</i>
2. <i>Are utilities</i>	2. <i>Is water</i>	2. <i>Is anything</i>
3. <i>a refrigerator</i>	3. <i>a stove</i>	3. <i>a balcony</i>
4. <i>4:00 this afternoon</i>	4. <i>10:00 tomorrow</i>	4. <i>7:00 tonight</i>
5. <i>That's fine.</i>	5. <i>Sure.</i>	5. <i>No problem.</i>

**Appendix F: Task 3 Dialogue**

Chorus the following dialogue with the teacher three times then practice with a partner alternating the A and B roles.

- A: Excuse me. Can I help you?  
 B: How do I get to Tokyo Station from Ebisu?  
 A: Take the Hibiya Line, the grey train, and get off at Ginza.  
 B: Okay.  
 A: Then transfer to the Marunouchi Line, the red train.  
 B: I see. How long will it take?  
 A: About twenty-five minutes.  
 B: OK. Thank you.  
 A: You're welcome.

Now substitute the cues below for the underlined words in the dialogue and practice with a new partner each time. Remember to keep eye contact with the second cue and try the third cue without looking at the dialogue.

Cues		
A	B	C
B: <i>Shibuya / Roppongi</i>	B: <i>Ayase / Ueno</i>	B: <i>Gaienmae / Kiba</i>
A: <i>Hibiya / grey / Ebisu</i>	A: <i>Chiyoda/green/KitaSenju</i>	A: <i>Ginza/yellow/Nihombashi</i>
A: <i>Yamanote / green</i>	A: <i>Hibiya / grey</i>	A: <i>Mita / blue</i>
A: <i>ten minutes</i>	A: <i>fifteen minutes</i>	A: <i>half an hour</i>

**Appendix G: Task 3 Model Tape Script**

Japanese man: Excuse me, can I help you?

Tourist: Uhhh, yeah. I can't figure out this subway map.

J: Where do you want to go?

T: I wanna go to Tasu-kuhgee.

J: Where?

T: Uhhh. You know, the big fish market.

J: Oh, Tsukiji?

T: Yeah, yeah.

J: Well, we're at Shinjuku Station now, so take the Marunouchi Line, that's the red train, to Ginza.

T: How do I know it's going the right way?

J: Take the train going towards Ikebukuro. It'll say on the side of the train where it's going.

T: Is it pretty close or...

J: It'll take about twenty-five minutes or so. So then, when you get to Ginza, transfer to the Hibiya Line. It's this grey train you see here on the map.

T: OK. So which way do I go on that one?

J: Look for the signs that say 'to Ueno'. They should be in English.

T: To 'Away-noh'?

J: 'Ueno'. Look at the map. It's here.

T: Oh, OK. Right.

J: Then, um, Tsukiji is just two stops after Ginza. It takes about four minutes. Do you understand?

T: Yeah, I got it. Thanks a lot for your help!

J: No problem.