

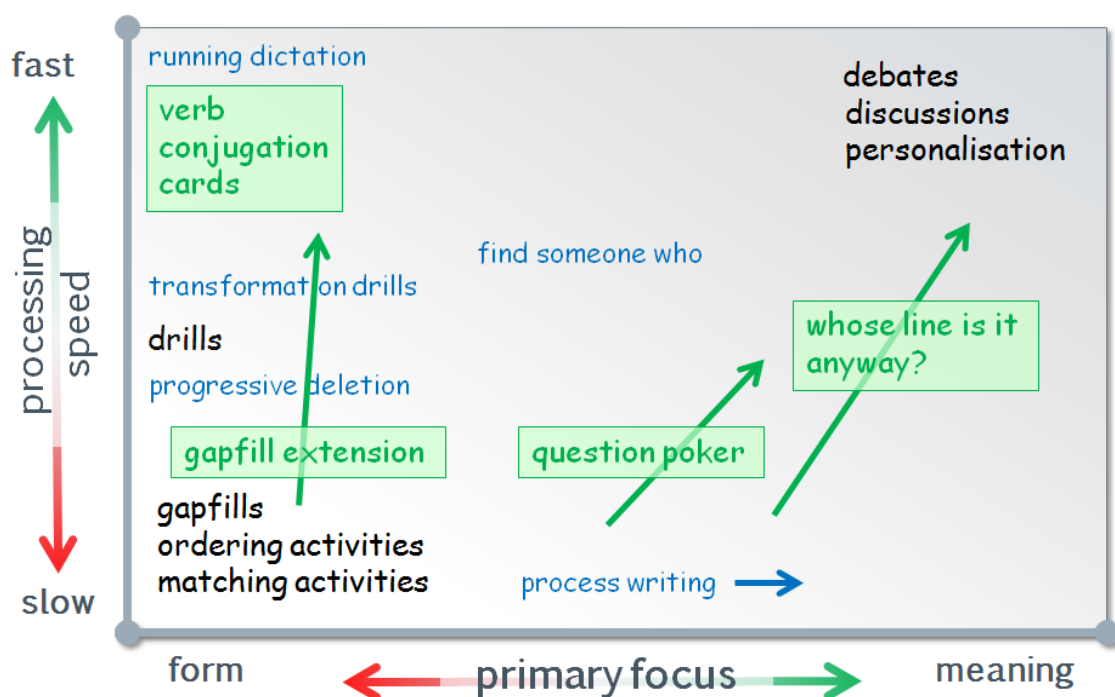
# Language Practice Activities

## Accuracy and Fluency

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### A Framework for Categorising Language Practice Activities



All feedback is welcome, including ideas, improvements, variations and criticism.

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**Focus: Form | Processing Speed: Fast****1) Verb Conjugation Cards****Introduction**

Verb conjugation cards are a resource to improve learners ability to conjugate verb tenses/aspects in positive, negative and question forms quickly, with the aim of helping them to automate this challenging part of language manipulation. They are used regularly, esp. after the introduction of new tenses, and should with regular practice help learners not to start omitting or confusing auxiliaries and participle forms. It's generally fun to play a 'snap' type game with them to put real time pressure demands on their processing skills, but they can also be used when clarifying new language to conduct drills. They are designed for display usage, not meaningful usage of language.

**Preparation**

Photocopy/print prompt cards onto 4 different coloured sheets of paper and laminate. You'll need enough so that each pair has their own set. Sheet 1 – subject pronouns (he, I, they, etc.). Sheet 2 – prompts for the 3 forms – 'positive', 'negative', 'question'. Sheet 3 – prompts for whichever tenses you want to help learners with (past simple, past continuous, etc.). Sheet 4 – high frequency verb phrases starting with bare infinitives (watch TV, check my/your emails, etc.). Cut out the prompt cards and sort out so that each pair has one of each.

**Procedure**

Learners play the game in pairs. They sort the cards into 4 colour coded piles, face down. One learner has control of two sets of prompts (e.g. subject pronouns and tenses) and the other has the other two (e.g. 3 forms and verb phrases). The learners count: "1, 2, 3!" and both turn over one card from each of their piles quickly and at the same time. The first learner to say the verb phrase indicated by the 4 cards wins. For example, if they turn over 'She', 'negative', 'present continuous' and 'watch TV', the first learner who says 'She isn't watching TV.' is the winner. They can keep score if they want to, and should continue doing this for 5 minutes, or play the best out of 11.

**Notes**

If they play this several times a week (or even every day) they will improve their conjugation abilities quickly, and, as a result, make fewer mistakes when speaking, due to having automated this part of their interlanguage. You can also add modals to the mix (in the tense pile) to make it even more challenging.

**2) Gapfill Race****Introduction**

Gapfill race is another activity that can be done with gapfills and pretty much any exercises that you find in 'Grammar Practice' books. We often forget that grammar practice exercises can and should be used to revise what learners learnt previously, so that they should now be able to 'do it' without writing the answers, demonstrating an increase in processing speed. Gapfill races are also useful for revising 'old grammar' before introducing new grammar. For example, I'd revise past simple irregular verbs before introducing past continuous (they'll both be used in a narrative tenses lesson). All pairs do the activity simultaneously under competitive time pressure, which helps develop 'form manipulation speed' while using language accurately. Most learners enjoy it, but it's worthwhile pointing out to them why they are doing 'easy exercises', why they can't write the answers and why it's important to do it competitively under time pressure.

**Procedure**

Choose two gapfills or similar exercises either from the learners' coursebook or a practice activity book (remember that Gapfill Race works best when the exercises are fairly easy for the learners). Make one copy of each exercise and the answers for each pair. Hand out the answers to the first exercise to student B

(who mustn't show the answers to their partner) and put the exercise itself face down in front of student A. When you say 'Go!', all the student As in the class turn over and do the exercise at the same time by saying the answers as full sentences to their partner (no writing). After each sentence, each student B (who can see the answers) will say 'correct' or 'wrong' to their partner. If it's wrong, student A must try again (saying the whole sentence) till s/he gets it right. After 3 attempts, student A can 'pass'. When student A finishes, student B shouts out 'finished'. If you want to score, the first pair to finish gets 5 points, the second 4, the third 3, etc. They then swap roles for the second exercise. The pair with the highest total wins.

**Notes**

You can use Gapfill Race for a test – teach – test lesson. They can do the exercises once at the start of a lesson / course of study, and then do exactly the same exercise again at the end. They should use a stopwatch to time their partner (available on mobile phones) and keep note of how long it took on the first occasion to compare with the second attempt. They'll always improve, partly because it's a second attempt, and partly because of the learning that happened in between. Nonetheless, they all experience a sense of satisfaction from this improvement!

**Focus: Form | Processing Speed: Slow to Fast****3) Gapfill Extension****Introduction**

Gapfills are the most common 'accuracy focus' activity, but when used in isolation, they do little to help learners prepare to use the language at faster processing speeds, or indeed, meaningfully.

Gapfill extension activities lift the gapfill off the page and into the learners' short-term memory. Through reuse activities, it's also likely to help learners to remember more of the new language structure long-term.

**Preparation**

Learners do a standard textbook gapfill activity. Answers are checked/confirmed.

**Procedure**

In pairs, learners transform the gapfill activity into questions, so that the question elicits the completed sentence. Both members of the pair note down the questions. For example:

**Exercise 1 – Articles**

Write 'the', 'a' or 'an' in each gap:

1. I had \_\_\_ sandwich for \_\_\_ lunch. What did you have for lunch?
2. We flew to \_\_\_ Dublin Airport in \_\_\_ Ireland. Where did you fly to?
3. It was \_\_\_ long flight, but eventually we arrived in \_\_\_ U.S.A.

How was the flight?

4. I'm trying to learn \_\_\_ Japanese. I'm having \_\_\_ lesson tomorrow. Do you speak any languages?

*Oxford Practice Grammar Basic, Coe, Harrison & Paterson, OUP, 2006*

Then all the learners stand, mingle and ask each other their questions. Weaker learners can peep at the answers if they need to, and stronger ones should try to answer without looking at the original exercise.

**Notes**

At higher levels, the learners can come up with questions spontaneously – have a go with this gapfill:

**Exercise 2 – will vs. present continuous for future**

Choose the correct/most natural form of the verb:

1. Diane isn't free on Saturday. She'll work / She's working. (e.g. Is Diane free on Saturday?)
2. I can't meet you this evening. A friend of mine will come / is coming to see me.
3. I think Jenny will get / is getting the job. She has a lot of experience.
4. We'll go / we're going to Italy for our holiday. My brother has a villa there.
5. I'll go / I'm going to a party tomorrow night. Would you like to come?
6. There's no need to be afraid of the dog. It won't / It isn't going to hurt you.

*English Grammar in Use 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. Raymond Murphy, CUP, 2004.*

**Focus: Meaning | Processing Speed: Slow to Fast****4) Text Interviews****Procedure**

Learners write texts on any topic of any length, working individually. They then swap texts with their partner. Their partner thinks of 10 questions for which the answers are found in the text.

They then take turns to interview each other. They are not allowed to see their text while they answer. Their partner can also correct any errors (factual or form) based on what's in the text.

**5) Whose line is it anyway?****Introduction**

SLA research indicates that allowing learners to prepare for a task helps them to improve accuracy and/or fluency during the task. As obvious as this is, some learners are nonetheless either reluctant to prepare or don't use the preparation time well. This activity makes it competitive, rewarding thorough preparation and also allowing for peer-teaching.

**Preparation**

You need a fluency practice activity (e.g. discussion questions, role play, personalisation task, problem solving task, etc.) and a few sheets of blank A4 paper.

**Procedure**

Sit learners in groups of 3-4 around a sheet of blank A4 paper, and let them read the activity instruction / discussion questions. They prepare for the activity individually by thinking of vocabulary items, expressions, etc. they will need for it. All the group

members write these words / expressions on different sides of the A4 sheet. Don't worry if it's disorganised and their areas start to overlap. Each can write as many as they want during the preparation time, which will vary depending on the task complexity and number of items to cover. They should write clearly. When they've all finished, they rotate the sheet slowly, so that they can see other learners' expressions. Allow a little time for them to ask each other questions regarding the meaning of the expressions, etc.

They all take a pencil or pen and the activity begins. During the activity, if a learner uses one of the vocabulary items, expressions, etc. they tick it off (and score a point). They can use their own and each others'. Used items can be used again. When the activity has finished, each learner counts their points. The learner with the most points is the winner. The easiest way to do it is to get each learner to use a different colour of pen/pencil, then it's easier to work out who crossed it out afterwards.

## 6) Question Poker

### Preparation

Choose 2-3 conversation questions and create lots of question cards (one question on each card and enough space on the back to write an answer) so that there is one of each question card per student.

### Procedure

Sit learners in groups of 4-5 around a small desk. Distribute the cards to the students so that each one has one copy of each question. The students work individually to write their answers on the back of the respective cards, keeping them secret from their classmates. They should write neatly so that their personal handwriting style isn't obvious. The teacher should monitor, discreetly correcting any obvious mistakes. The cards are collected in by one group member, shuffled and laid on the desk so that the questions are facing up and the answers are hidden. The students now take turns to pick up cards and ask the questions. The first student (the asker) takes a card and looks at the answer. They ask

it to the person that they think wrote the answer. This person should give the answer they wrote on the card. If the asker guessed right, they show the answer and keep the card. If not, they put it back in the same place, answer facing down. If, by chance, the asker takes their own card, they keep this secret, and ask anyone, putting it back afterwards without revealing that it's their answer. The next student then becomes the asker.

They continue taking it in turns until all the cards have been 'won'. The student with the most cards is the winner. As the game progresses, the students try hard to remember where each answer is and who said what. Each student may be asked the same question several times, repeating the same answer each time (leading to imprinting for both speaker and listeners). The more questions there are, the greater the challenge.

Keep the cards and play it again with exactly the same cards as a warmer to next lesson.

## Focus: Meaning | Processing Speed: Fast to Slow

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## 7) Peer Summarising

### Introduction

We often get learners to summarise their partners' opinions during feedback to a speaking practice activity. This method takes this a step further, turning it into a jigsaw activity. It can be used with any discussion activity (personalisation, opinion, description, etc.).

### Procedure

Prepare the learners for a discussion activity. Before they begin, inform them that they will take notes on what their partner says and then use these notes to write a short text. They begin the

discussion, taking notes on their partner's ideas as they like. Make sure they don't slow down what they're saying in an attempt to dictate the sentences. Once they've finished, they work individually, writing a short text to summarise what their partner said. They then show this text to their partner for checking and correction. The final stage of the activity involves separating learners into groups of 3-4 to summarise what their partners said. Each pair should be in different groups.

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