

Deconstructing Jigsaw Activities

Jason Anderson

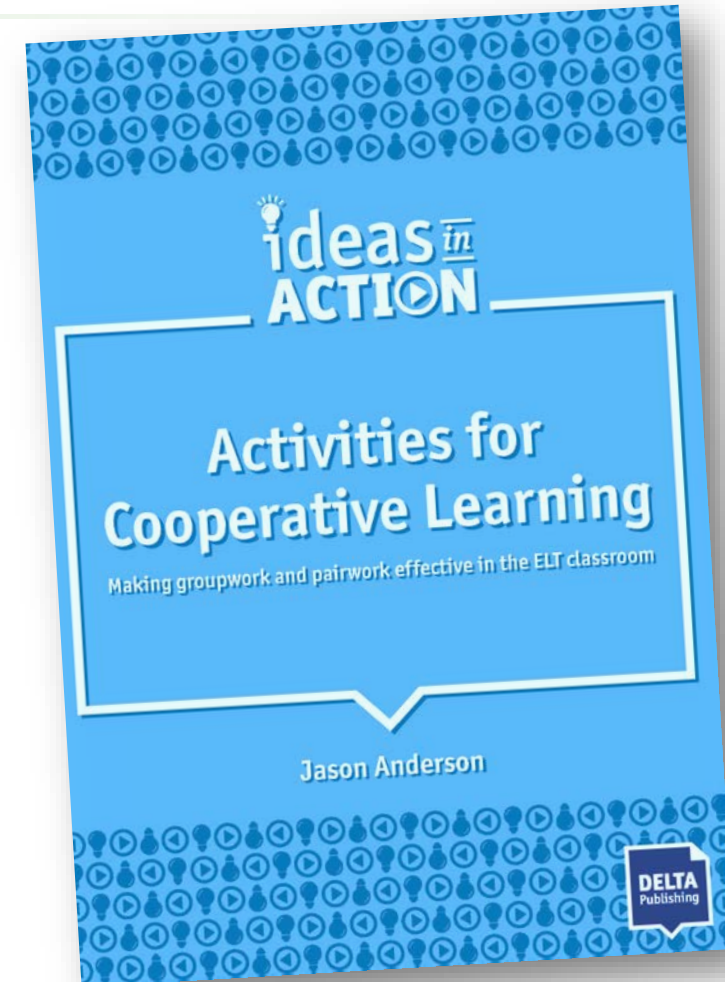
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Plan for the workshop

1. Quick check: What is jigsaw (and definition)
2. Background and benefits of jigsaw
3. Adoption of jigsaw into communicative language teaching
4. What was lost
5. Taxonomy of jigsaw activities
6. 2-3 original ideas for jigsaws



Quick check: What is Jigsaw?

*Quick chat in
pairs or
threes.*

My definition:

- A jigsaw is a cooperative information gap activity with two stages. The **input stage** involves input of information (usually a text), with different learners accessing different information to create an 'information gap'. The **communication stage** follows this, and involves communication of that input to others in pair or group interaction, for a range of purposes.

Based on Aronson et al. (1978), but also recognising ELT perspectives (e.g., Johnson, 1981; Littlewood, 1981).



Background to Jigsaw

- Elliot Aronson's work in Texas, USA, early 1970s; jigsaw introduced as means to reduce tension between ethnic groups after desegregation (see Aronson et al., 1975, 1978, and [here](#)).
- Aronson drew on principles within cooperative learning movement to encourage cooperative rather than competitive learning.
- In mainstream teaching, jigsaw is typically used to foster **peer-teaching** of declarative knowledge.
- Brought into CLT in the late 70s/early 80s (see Johnson, 1981), since when it's been seen as a means to facilitate (acquisition through) skills practice: hence '**information gap**'.

More on the history of jigsaw and information gap here:

<https://speakinggames.wordpress.com/2019/03/24/on-the-origins-of-jigsaw-and-information-gap/>



Some benefits of, and evidence for, jigsaw

- *Text-based* jigsaw provides language input and output opportunities (integrated skills).
- Learners are both recalling and reconstructing content, involving short-term, intermediate-term and long-term memory.
- Adaptable to many EL environments (incl. CLIL, EMI, text-based LT) and curricular contexts (e.g., grammatical, thematic, lexical, task-based, etc.).
- **Support from classroom studies:** Increases cooperation, social skills and interest in school (e.g., Blaney et al., 1977). Coop learning supported in large class ELT contexts (e.g., Chen, 1999; Ning, 2010; Panhwar, 2016).
- **Support from SLA theory:** Potentially able to promote noticing (Schmidt, 1990), comprehensible/pushed output (Swain & Lapkin, 1995). Evidence that it increases negotiation of meaning (Long & Porter, 1985).
- **Coop learning in the meta-analyses:** High achievement effect sizes demonstrated (e.g., Hattie, 2008; Johnson & Johnson, 2009; Marzano, 1998).



Lost in translation: What may CLT have lost when it imported jigsaw?

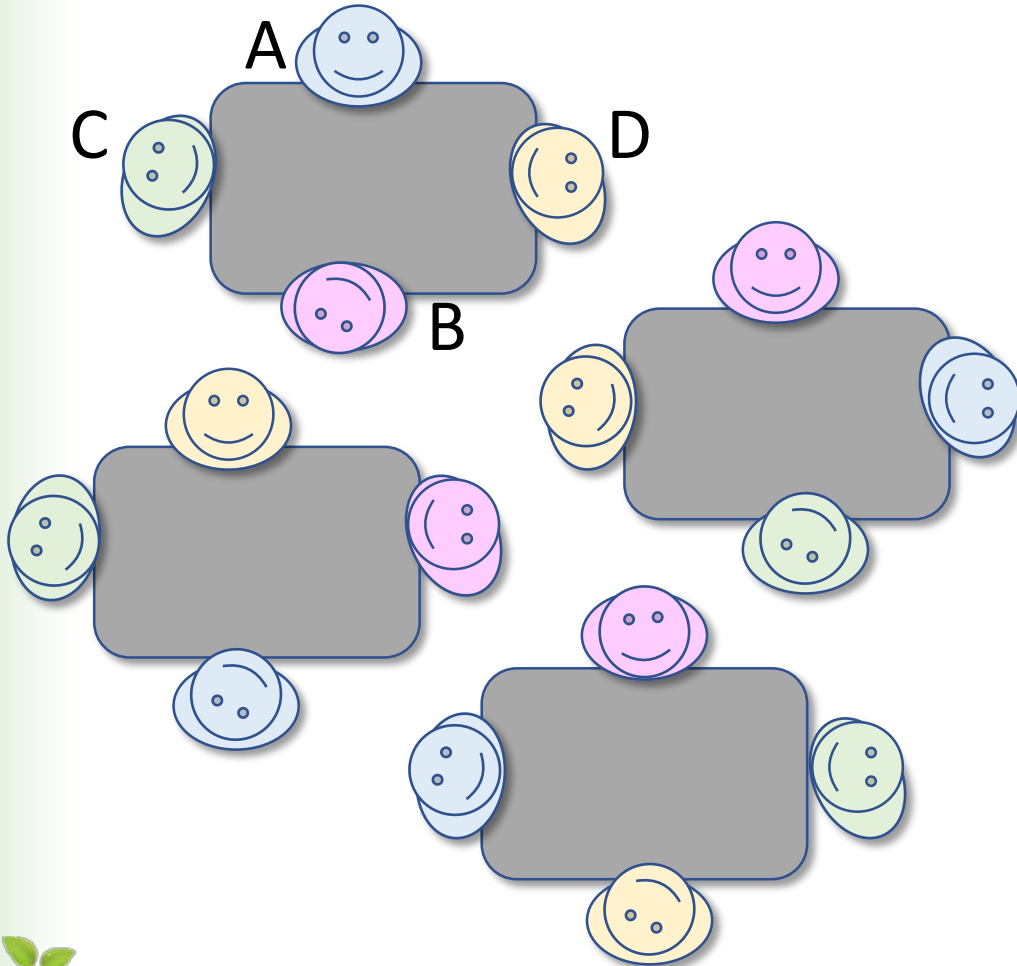
- **Positive interdependence** and **individual accountability** (Anderson, 2019b; Johnson & Johnson, 1994; Kagan & Kagan, 2009; Slavin, 1995).
- Importance of jigsaw as a **means for learning declarative content** (aspects of lexis, grammar, etc.), rather than just skills practices.
- Importance of jigsaw as a means for **peer teaching**.
- Potential focus on **higher order thinking skills** (HOTS).
- **Base/home groups** and **expert groups** – 2 essential stages to making (cognitively) challenging jigsaws work (Anderson, 2019a).



Base/home groups and expert groups - summary

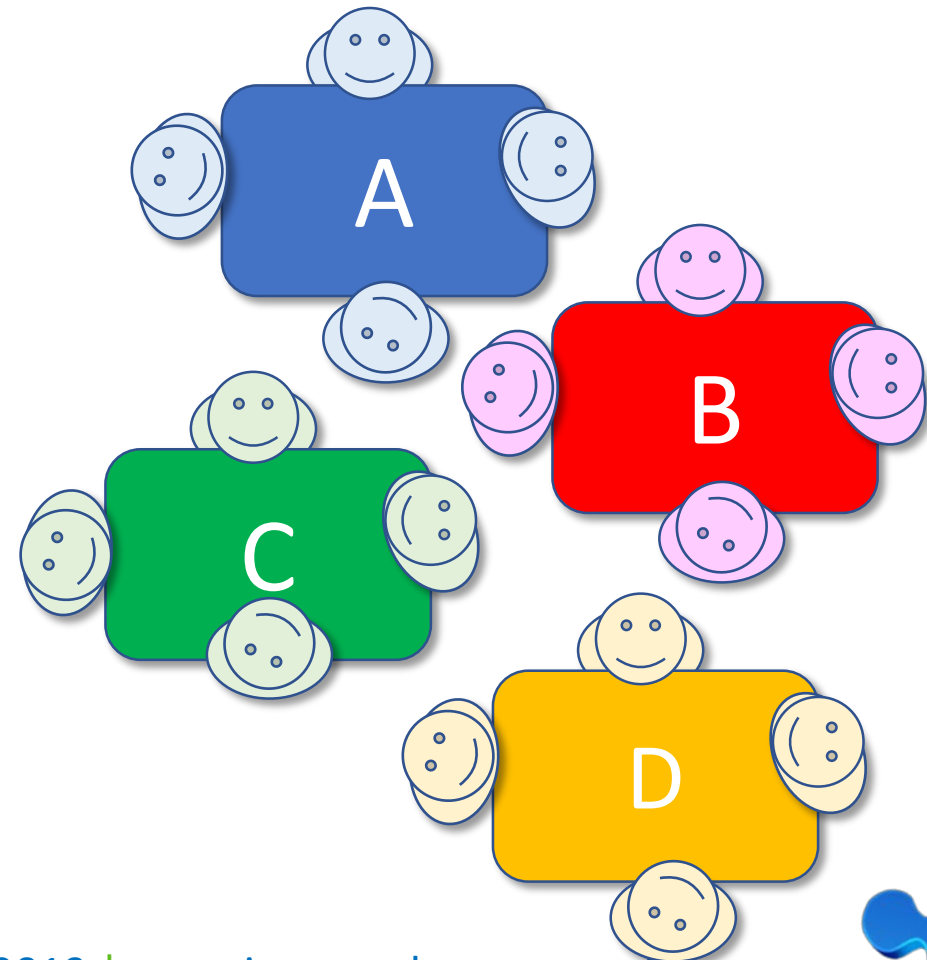
Home groups (stable, mixed-ability)

Use for most activities



Expert groups (ability-matched)

Use for text input



From 'comprehension...' to 'synthesis questions'

- Questions for jigsaws in ELT coursebooks tend to mirror typical comprehension questions for reading tasks.
- **Problem:** On their own, such questions tend to encourage 'regurgitation', rather than interpretation, comparison, evaluation and synthesis (HOTS) of what they've read (i.e. 'synthesis questions').



From 'comprehension...' to 'synthesis questions'

Just the job! – Ken

When I tell people what my job is, their response is always: *'Tell us a joke, then!'*. This is the worst thing about my job. The best thing is that I travel a lot, working in clubs and theatres around the country, although I don't work very sociable hours. When I'm on tour, I work two or three hours every evening, between 7 and 11pm. Some audiences are friendly, others aren't, and I really hate it if they don't laugh. My income is quite good - I make about £300 a night, but I can only do about 120 nights a year before I go mad!

People often ask me where I get my ideas from. It can be really difficult. I go out a lot, meet different people or just watch them, looking for something to laugh at. It can be quite stressful doing this job, but I get a lot of reviews in the newspapers or on the radio. Every two I might try writing a comedy sketch. At the moment, I'm really happy with my job.



Just the job! – Carla

I'm originally from Canada, where I trained to be a teacher, but now I work in India for an international NGO called Child Aid. I work on our 'out-of-schools programme', managing a team of nine people. It's our job to help children, especially girls who have left school early, to get back into education. This can be really difficult, because many are married with children and their families sometimes don't want them to go back to school.

When people ask me what hours I work, I find it difficult to answer. I work from early morning to late in the evening most days, and I even do a few hours work at the weekend. The pay is not great – I earn about £2,000 per month, but I

am happy living here and my family is doing well. But that isn't why I do the job. I love being in class, learning and enjoying the progress of the children when they graduate from school. It's the best feeling ever! I don't have anything else.

Typical 'comprehension' questions:

1. Where does she/he work?
2. What does she/he do?
3. How much does she/he earn? etc.

Think of 3-5 synthesis questions for the communication stage appropriate to these texts.

From 'comprehension...' to 'synthesis questions'

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People often ask me where I get my ideas. It can be really difficult. I go out a lot, meet comedians or just watch them, looking for something new. It can be quite stressful doing this job, especially when I see reviews in the newspapers or online, so sometimes I might try writing a comedy or sitcom. At the moment, I'm really happy with my job.

1. Who works hardest?
2. Who makes the most money?
3. Who do you think has the most difficult job? Why?
4. Who is happiest? Why do you think this?
5. Which job would you prefer? Why?

Just the job! – Carla

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When people ask me what hours I work, I find it difficult to say. I work from very early morning to late in the evening, and I do a few hours work at the weekend. I don't earn about £2,000 per month, but I don't have a cheap living here and my expenses are high. But that isn't why I do the job. I love being in class, learning and enjoying it, and when they graduate from school and go to college, it's the best feeling ever! I don't do anything else.



The taxonomy

Input stage

Text source (teacher selected; learner selected; learner researched)

Text type (non-pedagogic; pedagogic; metalinguistic)

Text medium (written; aural; video)

Text difference (multiple texts; near-identical texts; fragmented text; different code; etc.)

Time gap between stages

None (as in typical jigsaw reading)

Stage 1 completed before class (i.e. flipped jigsaw)

Stages 1 and 2 completed in different lesson ('recall' jigsaw)

Communication stage

Group size (pairs; groups; whole class)

Interaction dynamic (seated; mingle; IT-mediated)

Communication type (retell; structured; synthesis; task; pedagogic activity; preparation
(see Anderson, 2019c)

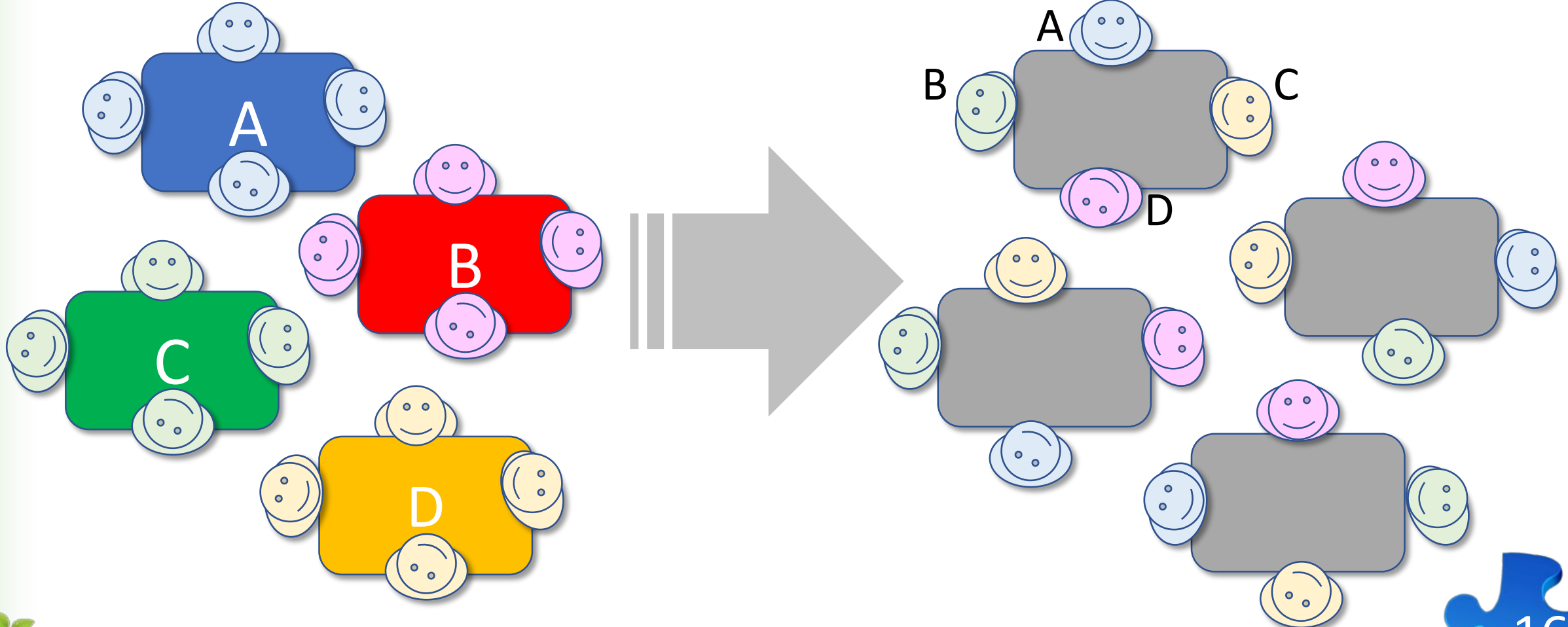


Grammar or lexis jigsaw

Discuss: How might a metalinguistic jigsaw work?

Input stage: Expert groups

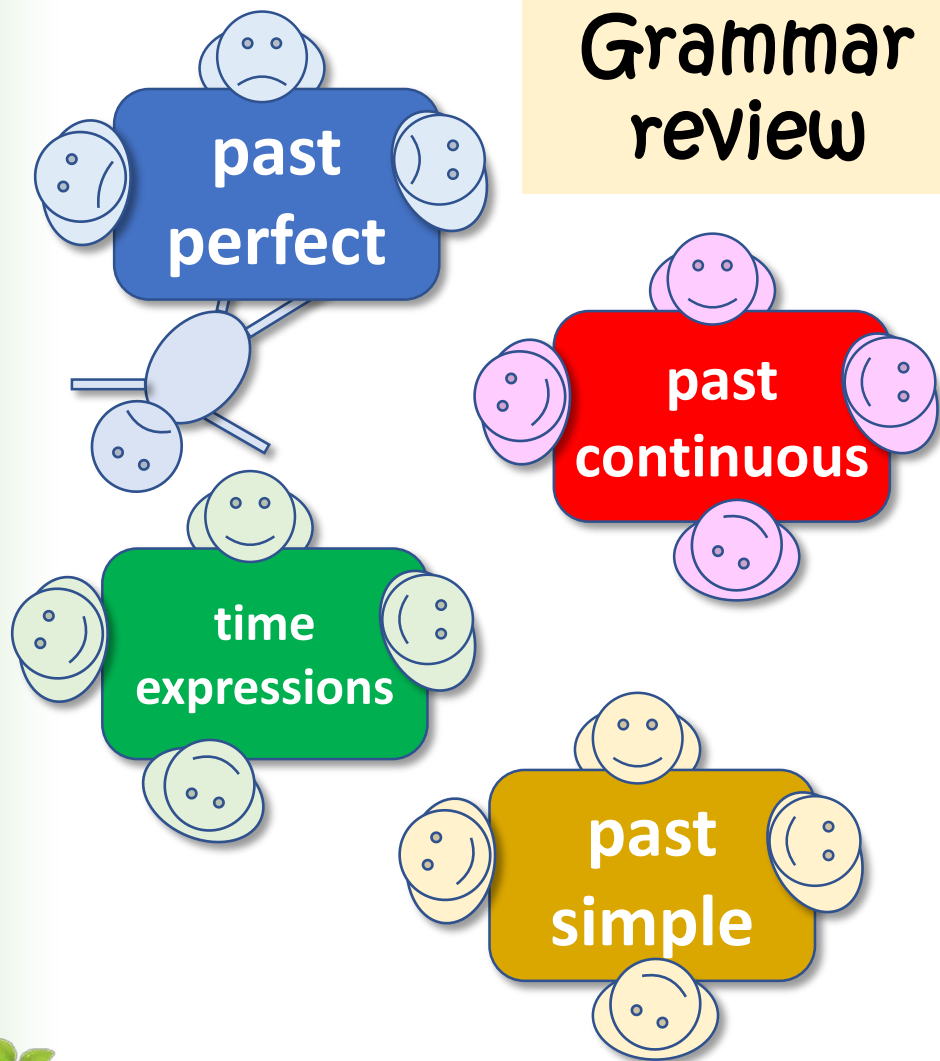
Communication stage: Home groups



Grammar jigsaw: Narrative tenses

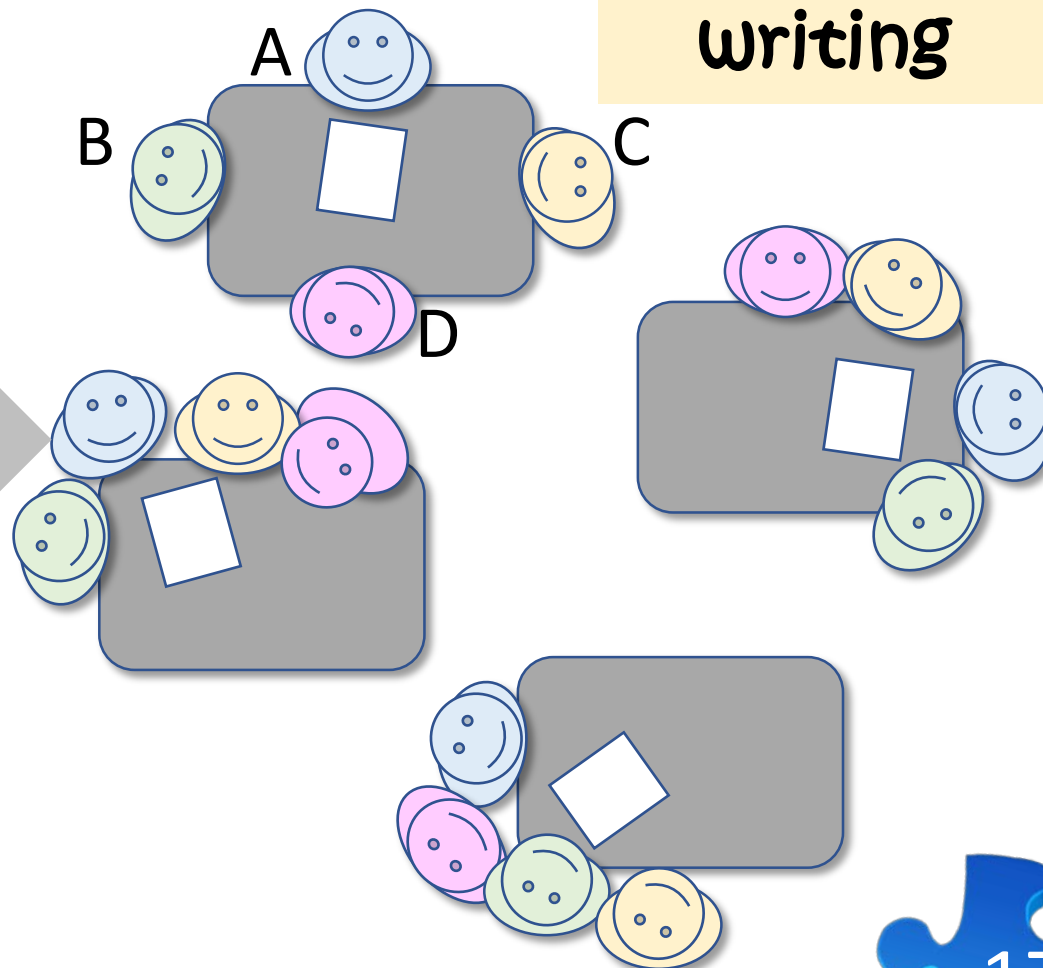
Input stage: Expert groups

**Grammar
review**



Communication stage: Home groups

**Story
writing**



Grammar Jigsaw: Example from Activities for Cooperative Learning

Uses 'Test-Learn-Test' (TLT) structure.



1. There is a problem with the grammar in this story. Read it, then discuss: What is missing?

BLIND VIOLINIST

My friend Esra told me funniest story about when she was travelling to Cairngorm mountains in Scotland in July last year. She sat down opposite old man who had white stick, violin and wore dark glasses. There was dog sitting next to him, so she thought he was blind. They got chatting and she found out he played violin in Scottish Symphony Orchestra. He was on his way home from work.

Anyway, train had just left Edinburgh when old man went to restaurant car to get lunch and came back with some sandwiches and newspaper. He sat down and

opened newspaper. His dog was now sitting next to him, and every time dog barked, man turned pages. Just then, train conductor came to check our tickets. He saw man reading and explained: "Sorry, sir. Dogs are not allowed on trains unless their owners are blind."

"Oh, but I am blind," said man, "but my dog isn't, and he likes to read Times on long journeys."



2. You probably noticed that there were no articles (*a, the*) in the story. In your groups, insert articles wherever you think they are necessary. Use a pen if you are certain, and a pencil if not.
3. Now get into expert groups. Each group will learn about one of the three article situations:
 - A. Situations where we use *a* or *an*
 - B. Situations where we use *the*
 - C. Situations where we don't use *a/an* or *the* (called 'zero article')
4. Once you have worked in your expert groups, come back to your home group. Using the information you learnt in your expert groups, check your story again and make changes where necessary.
5. Your teacher will check the answers with you.
6. Working together, try to retell the story. One group member can look at the correct story and prompt the others if they forget anything.



Group A information sheet: a / an

Match the rules with the example sentences:

1. Use *a/an* the first time you mention something or someone.
2. Use *a/an* with singular countable nouns when it isn't important which one you're talking about.
3. Use *a/an* when you state someone's job.
4. Use *a* (not *an*) before words that don't start with a vowel sound.
5. Use *an* (not *a*) before words that start with a vowel sound.
6. Use *some* instead of *a/an* with plural nouns.

- a. My brother Mark is a secondary teacher.
- b. The plane was delayed for an hour.
- c. I bought some new books yesterday.
- d. I saw a really good film last night.
- e. Could you pass me a pen, please?
- f. I have just had a coffee.

Now cover the rules, read out the example sentences and try to remember the rule.



Translingual news jigsaw

Access the following news story in a language other than English:

- **NAME OF NEWS STORY HERE**

Compare with colleagues who have accessed the story in different languages to you.

Compare the following:

- **Headline:** Compare literal translations; discuss connotation, etc.
- **First paragraph:** Do the different stories provide the same basic details; any differences?
- **Images:** Compare these: Which are more positive? Negative?
- **Bias and neutrality:** Can you find any difference in the 'position' of each text? Which is most neutral (in your opinion)?



Whole class jigsaw (e.g. story)

1. Take a simple story, ideally one with a twist or two.
2. Strip it down to the bare narrative.
3. Split it into strips (any number).
4. Hand them out randomly to students, 1 each.
5. 1 minute to memorise the info. on strip – then destroy/pocket.
6. Students mingle and tell their ‘bits’ of the story to each other.
7. Students return to their home groups and reconstruct the story.
8. Doesn’t matter if they haven’t all heard each part – it should all be there in the home group... and even if it isn’t – they can still create a story.



Activities for cooperative learning – Contents

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See my blog post on the origins of 'jigsaw' and 'information gap' activities [here](#).

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