Chapter 1
Guiding Principles

Pre-test
Before reading this chapter, indicate whether the following statements are true or false, based on what you know or believe . . . for now!

- Acquisition is about developing the ability to communicate in the target language.
- Learners cannot control what they acquire, but teachers can.
- What happens in language classrooms is primarily “communicative practice,” as opposed to true communication.
- Acquiring your first language is vastly different from acquiring a second language.
- Our role as language teachers is to explain how the language works.

Once you have finished, or while you are reading this chapter, verify your answers.

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW?

Defining Acquisition

A lot of pedagogy books talk about how to facilitate acquisition, but are we all on the same page with respect to what acquisition is? Without a clear understanding of what we are trying to achieve, it is quite difficult to know if we are going about it the best way. If someone asked you to define “language acquisition,” would you feel confident and comfortable doing so? You’re not alone if you’re second-guessing yourself. It’s like when someone asks you to define “culture” or “language.”

The simplest definition of language acquisition is: the (mostly) implicit process of building a linguistic system by making form-meaning connections from the input. Basically, acquisition is what happens to you while you’re busy understanding messages.
Why did we say “mostly” implicit? That’s the best common ground we can find among a very complex discussion involving theoretical constructs that we won’t get into (e.g., consciousness, awareness, etc.). We’re trying to keep it simple here! What you should know is that it is a process we cannot consciously control. You can’t wake up one day and say, “I’m going to acquire the present progressive today!” Neither teachers nor students have total control over what will and will not be acquired. Indeed, not everything from the input becomes part of the linguistic system, at least not in an immediate and predictable manner. As Lightbown and Spada (2008) said, “language acquisition is not an event that occurs in an instant or as a result of exposure to a language form, a language lesson, or corrective feedback” (p. 182). The reason why not everything becomes part of the system is that our brains cannot process everything, all at once. What gets and doesn’t get processed? When we communicate, our main priority is meaning. Therefore, parts of the input that help us understand the message are more likely to get processed. And that is the two-sentence explanation of an incredibly complex phenomenon! In Chapter 3, we will discuss ways in which we can help learners get the most out of the input.

Notice also that the definition does not say anything about “learning to talk,” “communicating,” “mastering the language,” etc., and that’s because we should be careful about mixing “acquisition” with “skill development.” If we approach language teaching as “let me explain how this works, then you practice it, and now you can use it,” we are essentially expecting output without input. When we look at the roles of those two very important concepts in subsequent chapters, this distinction will become even clearer. For now, it is imperative to be on the same page about the following points:

- Input builds the system (acquisition).
- Output helps learners get better at accessing the system (skill development).
- No input? No output.

Output does not build the system, and neither does learning about the language. We don’t acquire a language by learning its rules and applying them. We can express meaning accurately without being able to fully articulate any of the rules we just used. This is precisely why we said that acquisition is a (mostly) implicit process: The magic happens outside of your conscious zone.

That definition is the same for all languages. Now, we are not saying that all languages should be taught exactly the same way, with identical lesson plans simply translated from one language to the next. All we are saying is that no evidence suggests that only some languages can be acquired through input while others must be acquired by studying grammar rules. Naturalistic acquisition is possible for all languages, and that fact tells us that the roles of input, output,
interaction, etc., are the same. And that’s precisely what we’re focusing on in this book. Even if one of the sample activities we suggest doesn’t quite work for the language you teach, you can still apply the fundamental principles behind it.

In case you’re wondering . . .

What about individual differences? Although it is undeniable that language development is not uniform across learners, the consensus about the impact of individual factors is not uniform either! First, it is difficult to measure internal and external factors, such as motivation, aptitude, and anxiety, in a reliable way; second, it is almost impossible to isolate some of these factors from others. More importantly, in the vast majority of educational settings, we teach a heterogeneous group of learners, and it is not realistic to expect individualized lesson plans. Nevertheless, it is beneficial to incorporate student choice whenever possible: free voluntary reading, assignment formats, prompts for final projects, etc. It is also important for instructors to understand their students’ needs, preferences, and beliefs. This understanding doesn’t mean changing your entire curriculum based on what the students want, but rather, taking time to address concerns, adding more variety in how you deliver the content, carving out some one-on-one time, and prioritizing learning over policies (e.g., accepting late work, letting students re-do assignments, etc.). We invite you to adapt, combine, and expand on the activity ideas we suggest in this book, so that your lessons have something to offer to every learner.

Defining Communication

We said that acquisition is the mostly implicit process of building a linguistic system, and we build this system through the interpretation of meaning, which is a key aspect of communication. Therefore, let’s make sure we agree on what is and is not “communication,” since that will guide the rest of the book.

Communication is probably the most famous of the 5 Cs within the World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages (National Standards Collaborative Board, 2015). The other Cs are: cultures, comparisons, connections, and communities. The 5Cs don’t exist isolated from each other; they are very much interconnected. In fact, communication inevitably implies awareness of the audience, the purpose, the context, and all of its many pragmatic (and cultural!) intricacies. Although the focus of this book is mainly about helping learners develop a linguistic system that they can use to engage in communication, we do not deny the importance of the other Cs.

One of the best definitions of communication is VanPatten’s (2017): “the expression, interpretation, and negotiation of meaning with a purpose in a given context” (p. 12). It is indeed a fantastic definition, but everyone seems to picture
something different when it comes to the context and purpose. According to Van-Patten (2017), the context of a language classroom cannot be altered: Students are students. Asking them to assume any other identity (tourists, restaurant customers, celebrities, etc.) would ignore the context, and therefore, the result would not be communication, rendering the purpose to be merely language practice. Instead, VanPatten (2017) emphasizes the need to respect the context of the classroom, where the purpose of communication is to learn about each other or the world around us. So, for instance, if you created an activity where one learner gives directions to another learner, who has to mark the route on a map and then indicate where they arrive, that wouldn’t be true communication, according to VanPatten (2017). And here’s where things get tricky because proponents of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) would say that is indeed a communicative task.

Is there common ground? Yes. First, we can all agree that communication should be what determines the linguistic resources we need, as opposed to the other way around. In other words, “communication (. . . ) cannot be equated with first learning some vocabulary, then learning some grammar, and then finding something to talk about to use the grammar and vocabulary” (Lee & VanPatten, 2003, p. 1). Also, while it may be true that most of what happens in language classrooms could be considered “communicative practice,” as opposed to true communication, nobody is saying that engaging in a task/activity where one learner provides directions to another has no value at all for language development. And, at the end of the day, our main goal is to help students be able to communicate outside of the classroom, right?

So, at the risk of oversimplifying, we’ll define communication as the purposeful interpretation and/or expression of meaning. For the context of the classroom, we propose these two questions to determine whether an activity involves communication:

- What information or content is being conveyed?
- What will the audience do with the information?

Let’s look at some examples. Try to answer the two questions above for each of the following activities:

1) Learners read two short stories and decide which one they like best.
2) Learners write the list of ingredients of their favorite dish, and then the class has to guess which dish it is.
3) Learners underline all of the plural nouns in a paragraph.
4) Learners write down a series of sentences that the teacher reads to them (i.e., a dictation activity).
5) Learners form sentences based on clues like this: “Mary / walk / park / yesterday.”
If you had a hard time answering both questions for the last three examples, that is because they do not involve communication. First, learners could do what you’re asking them to do without understanding (i.e., without interpreting meaning). You could write down something you hear—to the best of your abilities—without knowing what you’re writing. You could underline plural words without understanding what they mean. Sure, you can’t do that without knowing anything at all about the language, but you can certainly get the activity done without focusing on meaning. For instance, if you asked students after one semester of Spanish to underline the plural nouns in the sentence “¿Te gustan mis pantuflas?” (Do you like my slippers?), they would underline pantuflas and they would be correct, even if they didn’t know what the word means. And that is a problem because the linguistic system cannot be built without form–meaning connections. As for being purposeful, it’s clear that the only reason why learners are doing the activities is to practice a particular form. Why else would learners need to form a sentence based on “Mary / walk / park / yesterday”? Nobody will do anything with that information.

On the other hand, the first two examples do involve the purposeful interpretation and/or expression of meaning:

- When learners read two short stories, they are interpreting meaning with the purpose of deciding which one they like best. It would be difficult to decide what story they like best if they had no clue about what they were reading.
- When learners write the list of ingredients of their favorite dish, they are expressing meaning with the purpose of conveying what goes into their favorite dish. And the rest of the class is interpreting meaning with the purpose of guessing what dish it is.

Throughout the book, you’ll see that we will keep asking ourselves those two questions as we evaluate other common practices and activities in language classrooms.

**The Three Modes of Communication**

If you ask anyone to describe ways of communicating, they will likely mention the four skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. While that is a perfectly valid answer, a way to underscore the importance of context and purpose is to talk about the three modes of communication, which we summarize in the table below. Saying “interpretive written communication,” for instance, makes it clearer that we are going beyond the cognitive process of decoding written symbols. However, this nomenclature does not mean that the four skills have disappeared; in fact, the ACTFL proficiency guidelines are written for each of the four skills!
### Mode | Role of students | Role of teacher | Examples
--- | --- | --- | ---
Interpretive | Understand, analyze, interpret meaningful content (written, aural, visual, or graphic). | Select and provide meaningful content, and scaffold comprehension and analysis. | Students read a story and draw pictures to illustrate it. Students listen to a series of suggestions for travelers, and then they decide if each one is a “do” or a “don’t.”

Presentational | Convey meaningful information for a given purpose to a particular audience. | Provide guidance and feedback on the “what” and “how” of the presentation (i.e., help learners “polish” their content). | Each student explains how to prepare their favorite dish; the audience later decides which of the recipes they are most and least likely to try. Each student writes a description of a house for rent on a discussion forum; their classmates write a reply guessing how much the rent is based on the information provided.

Interpersonal | Interact with an interlocutor to exchange meaningful information for a given purpose, either synchronously (in real time) or asynchronously (not in real time, delayed). | Create tasks or opportunities for students to exchange meaningful information or be a participant in the exchange. | Students work together to plan a party (e.g., they exchange opinions as to the date and time, whom to invite, etc.). Students post an image of something important to them (e.g., an object, place, person, etc.) on a discussion forum. Classmates write replies with questions and comments, and the student who posted the picture responds, poses new questions, and so on.

As you read the descriptions, you probably noticed a lot of overlap. For example, aren’t we engaged in interpreting and presenting information while we engage in interpersonal communication? Absolutely! And isn’t the audience engaging in interpretive communication while the presenter is engaged in presentational.
communication? Indeed they are, once again! In fact, a well-designed presentational task must consider the role of the audience.

**In case you’re wondering . . .**

Is “interpretive communication” the same as “comprehension”? Indeed! ACTFL proposed the term “interpretive communication” to emphasize that comprehension shouldn’t be just about literal retrieval of information from a text (e.g., right and wrong answers). Comprehension is much more than understanding words, and it inevitably involves interpretation: We understand messages based on our own knowledge, background, experiences, etc. In other words, when we comprehend something, it’s our own interpretation of it! So, there is nothing wrong with saying “comprehension” when you refer to “interpretive communication,” as long as you understand that comprehension goes well beyond the surface of what is explicitly stated.

As important as it is to understand what the three modes are, it’s good to keep in mind what they are **not:**

- They are **not** tied to modality (oral versus written language). For example, you can have presentational writing and also presentational speaking. You can (and should!) have interpretive reading and interpretive listening. Even interpersonal communication can be either written or oral.
- They are **not** meant to happen in a linear way (e.g., you don’t always have to do presentational before interpersonal). That being said, learners can’t produce language without having had any input at all, and so it’s always good to start your lessons with interpretive communication.
- They are **not** meant to correspond to different proficiency levels (e.g., interpersonal is for advanced, interpretive is for novice).
- They are **not** supposed to be approached as isolated components of a lesson. In fact, the more they build on each other, the better, as the following example shows:

**Interpretive:** Students read a series of classified ads of houses and apartments for rent, and then they answer some comprehension questions. Later, the instructor describes her housing preferences, and students select one of the places described in the classified ads that they think would be the best option for their instructor.
Presentational: Students create a video tour describing one of the places for rent described in the classified ads, with additional information but without disclosing the location. Their classmates watch the videos and match each one with the corresponding ad.

Interpersonal: Students interview each other about their housing preferences (type, location, amenities, etc.). Then, they select the best and worst options for each other out of the places described in the video tours that their classmates created.

When it comes to the presentational and interpersonal modes, an important point to clarify is the issue of spontaneity versus preparation or “rehearsal.” Presentational communication involves, by definition, some level of preparation. Even if you ask learners to do impromptu presentational writing activities (e.g., free writing), learners can craft their messages more carefully since writing is inherently more controlled than speaking. At the same time, prepared or rehearsed does not mean perfect or memorized. With respect to interpersonal communication, asynchronous exchanges in writing (e.g., several emails back and forth) are indeed interpersonal communication, and yet they are not spontaneous. Oral synchronous interaction can also involve some preparation or rehearsal ahead of time (e.g., a job interview), and that doesn’t make it any less interpersonal. What interpersonal communication has at its core, whether written, oral, synchronous, or asynchronous, is an information gap between interlocutors: One person shouldn’t know what the other one will say or ask. So, for example, if two learners are reciting a dialogue scripted ahead of time, it is not interpersonal communication. We will come back to this issue in Chapters 5 and 6 when we explore output and interaction.

First versus Second Language Acquisition

So far, we’ve been saying “language acquisition” without distinguishing whether we are talking about acquiring our first language (L1) or an additional language (L2+), and that’s because many aspects of the process of building a linguistic system from input are the same for both L1 and L2+ acquisition. However, we should be very careful about assuming that whatever works for L1 acquisition can be readily applied to L2+ acquisition, let alone language teaching.

Here are some of the differences between L1 and L2+ acquisition:

- L2+ learners have a linguistic system already in place. This is probably the biggest difference that nobody disputes. A bilingual brain is not the same as a monolingual brain, and, as Grosjean (1989) said, a bilingual person is not two monolingual brains in one.
• Unlike monolingual L1 acquisition, L2+ learners make transfer errors, as well as other errors that are not from the influence of their L1 and are different from the type of developmental errors that we observe in L1 acquisition.

• Individual differences and external factors (e.g., motivation, aptitude, identity, etc.) may affect the outcome of L2+ acquisition; on the other hand, we can be fairly certain that babies acquire their L1 regardless of how motivated or extroverted they might be.

• The role of age: There seems to be a critical period for L1 acquisition but not necessarily for L2+ acquisition. This is certainly a heated debate among linguists, but based on what we know so far, acquiring an L2+ as an adult is more successful than acquiring your L1 as an adult (i.e., not having exposure to any languages until after age 12).

Some experts argue that any of these differences are irrelevant to the fact that the acquisition process is fundamentally the same. It is indeed important to note the following similarities between L1 and L2+ acquisition:

• Input is absolutely necessary; we develop a linguistic system making form-meaning connections, and without comprehensible input, that process cannot happen.

• Both L1 and L2+ learners exhibit U-shaped development, go through similar developmental stages, and make developmental errors (e.g., regularizing forms, like “foots” instead of “feet”).

• In both cases, explicit instruction does not seem to alter the process. Teaching someone a rule doesn’t mean they have acquired that feature, and that is equally true for L1 and L2+ acquisition.

So, what’s the verdict? Although the two processes are not radically different, we can’t quite conclude that L2+ acquisition is the same as L1 acquisition, especially when we consider that instructed L2+ acquisition (i.e., language classes) is vastly different from being surrounded by the language 24/7. There is a reason why we included the word “classroom” in the title of this book: As paramount as it is to understand the fundamentals of language acquisition, it is also important to acknowledge that language teaching doesn’t take place in an ideal vacuum.
The Role and Challenges of Language Teachers

Language teaching is unlike any other type of teaching because language acquisition is not the same as learning anything else (e.g., dancing, playing an instrument, solving an equation, etc.). It is not about showing learners how to do it, and then helping them master it through repetitive practice. Repetition and imitation are not the driving forces of acquisition. Consider this evidence: We say lots of things—good or bad—that we’ve never heard or read before. True, some chunks are memorized based on frequent exposure and repetition (e.g., “how do you say . . .?”), but when we communicate, we create with language. We don’t simply repeat and recombine phrases we have memorized.

So, what is the role of the language teacher when it comes to facilitating language acquisition and development? To give students opportunities to engage in purposeful interpretation and expression of meaning. Essentially, the teacher needs to provide an answer to the two questions we listed above: what information or content is being conveyed, and what will others do with the information? Whether it is information you are giving to them, or they are providing to someone else, you should give them a clear reason for wanting to interpret or express meaning, and the reason cannot be about “practicing” language. Of course, language teachers have many other important roles.

Language textbooks have certainly conditioned us to believe that our course goals should revolve around language itself (e.g., regular and irregular verbs, different verb tenses, a list of words related to travel, etc.), and sometimes it’s hard to imagine what classes could look like without a list of linguistic features to

In case you’re wondering . . .

How do you know what to teach and when to teach it? One observation about second language acquisition that has been made since the 1980s is that there are developmental sequences: Learners appear to follow a predictable order in which they progress toward the acquisition of certain linguistic features, and this order is not random or influenced by explicit instruction. As tempting as it may be to think that you should organize your courses around developmental orders, this observation was never meant to be about what to teach when. Instead, “the value of developmental sequences research is in helping teachers adapt their expectations of how progress can be seen in something other than an increase in accuracy” (Lightbown, 2003, p. 6). You should organize your course around meaningful content and communication, as opposed to grammar structures. And always remember that just because you taught it, it doesn’t mean they now know it!
“cover.” But when you think about it, most language courses start off with a communicative goal in mind, and the teacher helps the learners accomplish that goal: introducing yourself. Great! You probably would not start your very first day of classes with “today, we will learn present tense,” right? It would be equally as awkward to start by saying: “Hello! Here’s a list of words. Memorize them.” So, why do we go from focusing on accomplishing a communicative task (e.g., introducing yourself) to explaining how the language works and giving them long word lists related to each topic? Why not keep our approach as communicative as it is on day 1?

Although it may seem straightforward to say that our role is to provide opportunities to engage meaningfully with the language, being a language educator has its own unique challenges. Perhaps the most challenging aspect is that when we create curricula and courses, we are inevitably rushing a very slow process. We want results, and we want them now. Textbooks don’t help either: Their “thank-you-next” approach (i.e., every chapter covers something new) makes us think that after spending a couple of weeks on a specific aspect of language, our students now know it and are ready to move on to the next
one. They don’t. And they’re not. This race to the finish line also makes educators want to find “shortcuts” (e.g., explaining simplified rules or coming up with mnemonic devices), thinking they are speeding up acquisition. Remember that acquisition is a mostly implicit process, so why would we approach it from an explicit standpoint (i.e., learning about the language)? The only real way to speed things up is to create more opportunities for communication (i.e., engaging meaningfully and purposefully with the language), both inside and outside of the classroom.

### In a nutshell

Before we move on to classroom examples, summarize five main points from this chapter. What are your own takeaways?


Would you like to learn more?

Go to [www.hackettpublishing.com/common-ground-resources](http://www.hackettpublishing.com/common-ground-resources) for a list of suggested readings, webinars, and other resources.
What Does It Look Like in the Classroom?

Example 1: Transforming Grammar Drills

This example demonstrates how the teacher can modify a grammar drill, whose focus is to practice a particular structure (e.g., object pronouns, past tense), and turn it into a communicative activity, which involves the purposeful interpretation and expression of meaning. In the drill, the use of the targeted structure is forced and unnatural. By contrast, in the communicative activity, students can use any structures or words to communicate. In other words, the focus is no longer on practicing language, but rather on exchanging information with the purpose of determining something. We present two variations.

Proficiency level: Novice-High

Traditional Activity A: Drill Targeting Object Pronouns

Take turns asking each other the following questions. Answer in complete sentences, using the correct object pronoun, as needed. Follow the example.

Example: Do you wash dishes every day?
Yes, I wash them every day.

1) Do you sweep the floor every day?
2) Do you do the laundry every day?
3) Do you clean your room every day?
4) (more items like that)

Modified Activity

Step 1: Indicate on a scale from 1 to 5 how much you like or dislike doing the following chores: 1 = Please don’t make me do it! ---- 5 = I don’t mind at all and actually like it!

• Washing dishes
• Doing the laundry
• Cooking
• Taking out the trash
• Vacuuming
• Cleaning up
Step 2: Now, compare your answers with a classmate and summarize the information you learn here:

- Chores my classmate likes to do more than I do:
- Chores I like to do more than my classmate:
- Chores we both like:
- Chores we both dislike a lot:

Step 3: Based on that information, would you say you two would be good roommates?

**Traditional Activity B: Drill Targeting Past Tense**

Take turns asking each other the following questions. Answer in complete sentences, using the correct object pronoun, as needed. Follow the example.

Example: *Did you go to the store yesterday?*

Yes, I went to the store yesterday.

1) Did you talk to your friend yesterday?
2) Did you watch TV yesterday?
3) Did you exercise yesterday?
4) (more items like that)

**Modified Activity**

Step 1: On this handout, check off the activities that you participated in last weekend:

Last weekend, I . . .

... watched a TV show
... studied for a test
... read
... went to a friend’s house
... went to the movie theater
... ate out at a restaurant

*(more items like that)*

Step 2: Now, compare your answers with a classmate and summarize the information you learned here:
• Activities my partner and I have in common:
• Activities neither of us participated in:
• Number of places I went:
• Number of places my partner went:

Step 3: Based on that information, who had a busier weekend? Who likes to go out and who prefers to stay at home?

Example 2: Transforming Dictation Activities

This example shows how the teacher can modify a dictation activity, where the focus is solely on listening and proper spelling, as opposed to meaning. The students don’t need to understand what they are writing down; they just need to transcribe it accurately. The communicative activity still maintains the listening component for students to work on strengthening the aural-visual connection (i.e., matching how words sound and what they look like written down), but now the students need to understand what they are writing down to complete the rest of the activity.

Proficiency level: Novice-Mid

*Traditional Dictation*

The teacher reads sentences, and the students write them down verbatim:

1) I love to run.
2) We like to play basketball.
3) They love to watch movies.
4) Do you like to play videogames?

The teacher reads a few more sentences. At the end, the teacher shows students the sentences so they can correct any spelling errors on their piece of paper.

*Modified Activity*

Step 1: At the end of class, the teacher surveys students about their preferences out of a list of activities, which can be done on paper or using an online polling tool. Individually, students rank the activities from their favorite to least favorite.

• Play basketball
• Run
• Read
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- Watch movies
- Play video games

The teacher collects all responses and tallies up the most popular to least popular activity in the class. However, the teacher does not reveal the results and tells students they will find out next class.

**Step 2:** The next day, the teacher does the dictation portion of the activity by reading the same list of activities and having students write it down.

- Play basketball
- Run
- Read
- Watch movies
- Play video games

**Step 3:** After looking at the list, students rank the activities based on what they think are the most popular and least popular activities, similar to the TV show *Family Feud*. The teacher asks students for a few predictions. Then, the teacher reveals the true answers. Finally, as an exit ticket, the students express whether or not they agree with the top choice.

**Example 3: Interpretive Communication Activity**

This example demonstrates how interpretive communication is scaffolded in class. The thematic unit revolves around dates and events. The teacher guides students primarily with questions that require little output on their part and facilitates comprehension using visuals (i.e., pictures, calendars, gestures). Although the teacher is doing most of the talking, which is expected at the novice level, the students are actively engaged with the content throughout the lesson. The teacher rarely says more than 30 words without asking the students to respond in some way.

**Proficiency level: Novice-Mid/High**

Teacher: Today we are going to talk about community events. What events do we have in our community?

*The teacher shows options, next to pictures: football games, plays, festivals, concerts, etc.*

Students: Concerts!

Teachers: Yes, we have a lot of concerts in our community. Do we have concerts every day of the week: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday? Every day?
Students: No!
Teacher: Concerts are usually on what days? Fridays?
Students: Yes
Teacher: Saturdays?
Students: Yes
Teacher: Sundays?
Students: Yes . . . no . . .
Teacher: Not very common, right? Usually, concerts are on Fridays and Saturdays.

Let’s look at this calendar of events in Sunnydale. [Teacher displays a calendar of events for a community in the target culture.] Does Sunnydale have concerts, too?

Students: Yes! Saturday!
Teacher: That’s right. There is a concert this Saturday [points to the calendar].

How many of you like to go to concerts? Raise your hand.

*Students raise their hands, and the teacher counts.*

Teacher: About half of our class, fifty percent [writes “50%” on the board], like concerts. What type of music concerts do you like? Rock? Pop? Country?

Students: Pop!
Teacher. Me too! OK, but not everyone likes concerts. What other events are there for someone who likes music?

Students: Summer Festival on Sunday
Teacher: Ah, there’s a festival! They probably have music, right? And what events do they have for someone who doesn’t like music?

Students: Soccer game
Teacher: That works! On the same day?
Students: Yes, Sunday
Teacher: Who likes soccer? Raise your hand.

*Students raise their hands, and the teacher counts.*

Teacher: Who prefers football? Raise your hand.

*Students raise their hands, and the teacher counts.*

Teacher: Football is more popular in our class! Is football or soccer more popular in Sunnydale?
Students: Soccer

Teacher: Yes, soccer. They have soccer games on Sundays. They have a lot of events on Sunday, right? In general, do they have more events on the weekend or during the week?

Students: The weekend

Teacher: And that’s very common. In our community, we have more events on the weekend, too. But we don’t have identical events. Some things are different. Let’s look at this calendar of events for our community.

*The teacher provides students with copies of a calendar of events*

Teacher: Are there more sporting events in our community or in Sunnydale?

Students: Our community

Teacher: That’s true! OK, let’s look at these other statements. Which community do they refer to? Read each one, and write down if it describes our community or Sunnydale.

*The teacher displays statements like “There are more indoor than outdoor events;” “There are more events on Fridays than Saturdays,” “There are more sporting events,” etc.*

The lesson continues with other activities that engage learners in comprehension:

- Students use a Venn diagram to classify events that happen in both communities, as opposed to only one.
- Students suggest the best event for different people according to what they typically like and dislike, such as “someone who likes to be active.”
- Students do a modified version of “two truths and a lie”: Each student writes two events from the calendar that they want to attend and one they would not, by completing these sentences:

  Two events I want to attend: ______________.

  One event I do not want to attend: ______________.

Each student reads the three events they chose, but not in order. The class has to guess which one they do not want to attend, based on what they know about their classmates. For example:

Zach: soccer game, concert, and festival

Teacher: Which one does he not want to attend?

Rest of the class: concert!

Teacher: Is that right, Zach?

Zach: no, festival
Example 4: Presentational Communication Activity

This example serves to demonstrate how presentational communication is scaffolded in class. The teacher guides students through the process of writing a review of a local restaurant. Other alternatives include: reviews of a product, a TV show, a class, etc. This activity would take place after completing other interpretive communication activities with similar reviews.

Proficiency level: Novice-High/Intermediate-Low

Teacher: Today we are going to talk about local restaurants. Restaurants in our town. What are some local restaurants?

Students name several local restaurants

Teacher: We have several! Do you like all of these restaurants?

Some students: Yes!

Other students: No!

Teacher: We have different opinions, different preferences. Does it depend on the food?

Some students: Yes!

Teacher: It can also depend on the decor and the service. If the waiter is very slow and very mean . . . that’s not good! Let’s talk more about these three categories: food, decor, and service.

The teacher writes three columns with those headings on the board.

Teacher: Now, choose one local restaurant. Only one! It can be your favorite, or it can be any restaurant you know. And it can be good, or it can be bad. Don’t say the name of it. And don’t write it down! Just think. Give me a “thumbs up” when you know which restaurant you want to write about.

Students think, give thumbs up.

Teacher: Great! OK, first, let’s talk about the food. It’s the most important part, right? What words can you use to talk about food at a restaurant? Write a list.

The teacher gives students a minute to brainstorm on a piece of paper.

Teacher: OK, what are some words to talk about food at a restaurant?

Students offer up words such as “delicious,” “cold,” “appetizer,” “dessert,” etc. The teacher writes the words on the board, under the “food” column.
Teacher: Very good! Now, write a few sentences or phrases describing the food in the restaurant you chose. Think about positive and negative aspects. If you love all the food there, then only positive. But if something is not very good, you need to say it.

Students write; the teacher walks around and helps students, if needed. The teacher can also add words to the list on the board if many students ask for the same or similar words. After students have finished with that part of the review, the same steps are repeated for “decor” and “service.”

Teacher: OK, now take a few minutes to read everything you wrote. Read the sentences to yourself, slowly. Try to add a few more details. What other information can you give about the food, decor, and service of that restaurant? You can make changes, too, if you want.

Students reread what they wrote and add information or make revisions; the teacher walks around and continues helping students.

Teacher: Now, exchange papers with a classmate. Read what your classmate wrote, and try to guess which restaurant they are talking about. Also, include the number of stars that make sense for that review. So, for example, if everything is great, that’s probably five stars. But if anything was not very good, maybe it’s four or even three.

Students read a classmate’s review, guess the name of the restaurant, and assign a number of stars. Then, the original author confirms if they were right.

Example 5: Interpersonal Communication Activities

This example includes two variations of activities involving interpersonal communication, even when students do not have enough linguistic resources to hold a conversation on their own. Both examples could work with different age groups, although the second one might be a better fit for younger learners. The first activity is structured in a way that the teacher can help the students before they interact with each other. In the second activity, the teacher provides a model.

Proficiency level: Novice-High

Activity A: Daily Routine

Step 1: Complete these sentences in a way that describes your classmate’s routine, based on what you think is probably true. Then, add on two more predictions about their routine.
My classmate . . .

. . . wakes up at __________.
. . . goes to school by __________.
. . . eats lunch with __________.
. . . goes to __________ after school.
. . . eats __________ for dinner.
. . . __________ before going to bed.
. . . goes to bed at __________.
(Add another prediction here) ________________.
(Add another prediction here) ________________.

**Step 2:** Create questions for interviewing your classmate, and find out if what you wrote in Step 1 was right or not. For example, for the first item, you can ask, “Do you wake up at 7:00 a.m.?”

**Step 3:** Interview your classmate using the questions you wrote. Take notes of the answers if they don’t match what you predicted in Step 1. If any of your predictions were not right, ask questions to get the information you need to correct the statement. For example:

Student A: Do you wake up at seven?
Student B: No
Student A: What time do you wake up?
Student B: Six

**Step 4:** Based on what items you got right and which ones you got wrong, do you know your classmate very well?

(The teacher can also use the information they gathered to notice other trends or patterns among students’ routines.)

**Activity B: Our Pets**

**Step 1:** The teacher describes a pet without saying what type of animal it is, and students guess the animal. This activity would take place after students have had a chance to engage in interpretive activities related to pets, so the vocabulary won’t be new. However, they can also have a list of common pets (i.e., the word in the target language next to the corresponding picture) to help them remember the words.
Teacher: I have a pet. Her name is Addy. She is big and very silly. She eats a lot of food! She is black and white, and she has a lot of hair. She likes to play and run on the beach. What type of animal do you think she is?

Student: Is she a cat?

Teacher: No, she is a BIG animal. And she runs on the beach . . .

Student: Is she a dog?

Teacher: Yes! Addy is a dog. Which of these pictures is Addy?

*Teacher shows them three pictures of different dogs: one is brown, one is black and white, and another is all black.*

Students: Number 3?

Teacher: Careful . . . Addy is black and white, remember?

Students: Number 2!

Teacher: Yes!

**Step 2:** Students work in pairs. One student asks questions to guess what pet(s) their classmate has. If a student does not have any pets, they could talk about a family member’s pet or think about a pet they want to have. Depending on the level of the students, some additional scaffolding could be provided in the form of vocabulary, sentence starters, and sample questions, such as the following:

- What is your pet’s name?
- Is your pet big, small, or medium?
- What color is your pet?
- What does your pet like to do? (Sleep, eat, play, run, go outside)

Then, students switch roles. As an option to extend the activity, the students could draw the animal based on their classmates’ description.
1. Guiding Principles

23

NOW THAT YOU KNOW

Discussion and Expansion Questions

1) It is not uncommon to hear fellow language educators justify their teaching approach based on these ideas:
   a) “This is how I learned, and I am very proficient.”
   b) “Everyone learns differently, and for some students, drills are beneficial.”

   What could be some potential issues with these justifications, based on the fundamental aspects of language acquisition we have outlined in this chapter?

2) Some scholars have suggested that learners acquire the language not as a result of instruction but in spite of it. How do you interpret that suggestion?

3) In this chapter, we discussed the role and challenges of language educators. What about language learners? What would you say is the role of a language learner in a so-called communicative or proficiency-based classroom? And what are some of their challenges?

4) As a language teacher, you are bound to be asked what you think about language-learning apps or sites (e.g., Duolingo, Rosetta Stone, etc.). Look into one of them, thinking about the fundamental aspects of language acquisition we delineated in this chapter. How much of a discrepancy is there between the way those apps/sites work and what you now know about language acquisition? Would you recommend any of them to a friend who wants to learn a language on their own, or would you suggest they do something else entirely?

5) Many language courses are organized around the “present-practice-produce (PPP)” approach. What is the underlying assumption of this approach, which contradicts one of the fundamental premises we outlined in this chapter? And why are each of the three Ps problematic based on what you now know about language acquisition?

6) The audio-lingual method (ALM) has been discredited by experts for several decades now, and yet some educators still incorporate some techniques that resemble ALM. Do some research online about the tenets and main features of ALM, and then explain how they contradict some fundamental aspects of language acquisition.
7) Imagine you encounter this post on social media. What would you respond knowing what you now know?

I have explained gender agreement so many times. We have done a lot of practice and played fun games matching nouns and adjectives. Most of my students do just fine when we play our games. However, my students are still forgetting to change the ending of the adjective when they speak or write. HELP! I don't know why they're still not getting it. To me, it's such a simple rule. What else can I do to help students remember to use it?

8) Consider the following activity, which is popular in many language classes: Create a menu for a new restaurant. Include at least five items for each of these categories: appetizers, entrees, desserts, and drinks.

In this chapter, we proposed two key questions to determine if an activity was indeed communicative. In this case, it is clear what information is being conveyed, but it is difficult to say what others will do with the information. What could be a way to transform that activity so that it has a concrete, clear purpose?

9) We said that the 5Cs are interconnected. Can you think of specific examples of connections between or among any of the 5Cs, relevant to the language you teach?

10) Indicate if the following examples constitute interpretive, presentational, or interpersonal communication. If you're struggling to classify one of them, explain why.

   a) Students create a survey for other students to respond to, and then they summarize the results.

   b) Students are tasked with planning a trip for the instructor, so they prepare some questions to find out more about his/her travel preferences and budget, and then interview him/her. Using that information, they plan the trip; the instructor later decides which option is best.

   c) The instructor explains their routine, step by step; the students have to act it out.

11) Here are the first two steps of a possible variation for one of the transformed grammar drills (see Example 1). What can you do as a third step so that the activity has a clear purpose? After completing Step 2, what could students do with that information? Don't copy the same Step 3 as the example presented earlier in the chapter!
Step 1: On the board, the teacher writes several columns: “I went to a friend’s house,” “I played a sport,” “I studied,” etc.

Step 2: Students come up to the board and write their names under the activities that apply to them.

Step 3: ________________

12) In Example 2, we described one possibility for making a dictation activity meaningful. Here are other variations. Which one(s) would you incorporate into your classes? Would you modify anything?

Variation A: The teacher reads a series of true/false statements about a text students will be reading; students write them down verbatim, and they predict if the statements are true or false. Once the students have read the text, they confirm their answers.

Variation B: The teacher reads a series of sentences describing her daily routine; students write them down verbatim and later put them in the correct chronological order, based on what they think is most logical. The teacher confirms if the order is right.

Variation C: The teacher reads a series of sentences describing different pieces of artwork, and students write them down verbatim. Later, the teacher displays the images and students match each description with the correct artwork.

Observation and Application Activities

1) Choose an interpersonal or presentational activity from a language textbook, and try to answer the two key questions we discussed in this chapter:

   a) What information or content is being conveyed?
   b) What will the audience do with the information?

If needed, suggest a way to transform that activity so that you can provide a clear answer to both questions.

2) Observe two language classes at different levels (e.g., novice and intermediate, or intermediate and advanced), and take notes on the following:

   a) How were the three modes targeted in each class? Did you notice any differences between the two levels?
   b) What would you say the role of the instructor was in those two classes? Does the proficiency level of the students affect the instructor’s role?
3) Choose one of the examples we explained in the section “What does it look like in the classroom?” and create your own for the language you teach and a topic that would be appropriate and interesting to your students. Alternatively, you can choose one of the examples and modify it to target a different proficiency level.