Text-based Tasks

(Please answer in **full sentences** and **in your own words**)

1. What are some of the criteria described in the article for the selecting of text-based materials and tasks? Can you give a specific example of a text or task that meets one or more of these criteria?

2. What are some linguistic features of a text that can make comprehension difficult? What can the teacher do in terms of materials, strategies or task sequencing to help learners overcome these challenges?

3. What should a well designed text-based task allow learners to do? Can you give some examples of text-based tasks that you could use with adolescent Korean learners?

5 Text-based tasks

This chapter will illustrate some basic ways to design communicative tasks based on reading and listening texts or video extracts.

It begins by focusing on issues concerning the selection of suitable texts from available sources, and discusses whether we should grade texts or tasks. It explores the strategies involved in reading and listening, and looks at typical text patterns and the importance of recognising them. It then illustrates six different task designs which aim to encourage natural reading and listening strategies. Finally, it illustrates how texts can be presented in the task-based framework, and shows what teacher and learners do at each stage.

5.1 Defining text-based tasks

Chapter 2 offered a range of starting points for tasks. In this chapter, we shall look more closely at one of them: texts.

From now on I shall be using the word 'text' in a general sense to mean a continuous piece of spoken or written language. Texts in this sense will include

recordings of spoken language and extracts from video, in addition to the printed word. There may be suitable texts or recordings in your course materials, or you may need to supplement these by choosing extracts from other sources (see Focus 5). The texts themselves will increase learners' exposure to the target language in use.

Text-based tasks require learners to process the text for meaning in order to achieve the goals of the task. This will involve reading, listening or viewing with some kind of communicative purpose, and may well involve talking about the text and perhaps writing notes.

Such tasks may lead into a reading or listening activity (see Task A in Focus 5: *The boy who came out from the cold*), or can arise out of the text itself (see Task B: *Spiders*). Sometimes one text will give rise to three different tasks, one before the main reading or listening phase, one during, and one after.

5.2 Selecting and balancing exposure

For this section, think of a particular language course you are currently teaching, have recently taught, or once attended. Keep this course in mind as you read.

We saw in 1.3.1 that exposure to the target language is absolutely vital. Learners can only learn through trying to make sense out of the language they experience. So the quality of the exposure, i.e. to a well-balanced range of text types and topics, is crucial.

5.2.1 Coursebooks and students' needs

Because of the impoverished and restricted language found in some coursebooks, many teachers are aware of the need to use supplementary materials. But these must be chosen with due regard both for the language and the learner. For example, a course supplemented entirely by authentic texts taken from front-page stories in quality newspapers would most benefit a learner who was planning to take up journalism, but learners wishing for a broader, more general experience of English would need a greater variety of written and spoken texts.

We must make sure, then, that we look at each course we teach as a whole. By the end of it, what experience of the language will learners have had? We need to appraise, as objectively as possible, the overall balance of the language samples that the course exposes learners to. How far are they representative of their language needs?

We need to be aware of learners' possible end-of-course objectives and to think how they could continue their language learning independently after the course. This can help us familiarise them with appropriate sources, e.g. listening to BBC World Service, watching Euro-News, or listening and talking to target language speakers.

Some up-to-date coursebooks try to take account of all these things, though in different proportions. Many use authentic reading materials, audio cassettes, and some even have video components. All this is useful exposure, and should be assessed, together with the classroom language that the course materials are likely to generate, to see how far the total exposure meets the learners' needs.

teacher talk	+	student interaction	+	coursebook texts	+	task cycle language	+	recordings	+	reference material	= EXPOSURE

Nearly everyone is likely to need a basic command of the most frequent

words, phrases, structures and text patterns (see 5.3.3). Most learners also have their favourite topics or specialist areas. These may involve the teacher in supplementing the exposure provided by the coursebook. For example, if students want to chat to people they meet while abroad, they will need exposure to typical spontaneous interaction in English. This is the most difficult kind of language to record and harness for classroom use. It is nevertheless very important and ways of providing exposure to it will be given in Chapter 6.

In what other ways might their exposure need supplementing? Does the course help learners to make the most of outside sources? Might they feel more motivated if they could sometimes choose their own texts for class use? These and other questions relating to the learner's short and longer term aims need to be asked.

5.2.2 Sources of useful material

In Focus 5, I have tried to summarise the various types of exposure available for language learners.

Spoken language

I have distinguished between sources of real-time face-to-face language, and recorded or broadcast sources.

Face-to-face communication, where the learners have direct contact with the people they are listening to, can be one-to-one, in a small group, or as part of a larger audience. Face-to-face talk is often easier to understand because learners have recourse to paralinguistic features like gestures and facial expressions, which give clues to meaning. In a one-to-one situation they are also likely to be able to control the flow of language to suit their level of understanding. This naturally modified input may be easier to acquire from (see 1.3.1).

Many of the face-to-face situations in Focus 5 could be recorded by learners (see Chapter 6).[1]

Recorded communication would normally be professionally made programmes, for radio or TV or for audio cassette, compact disc, video or film. Some sources, like the BBC World Service, are aware their audiences are not native speakers of English, and adapt the language they use in a natural way, just as one adapts in real life when speaking to a stranger who has difficulties understanding. Extracts from such sources can be termed 'authentic', because they have not been produced with a specific language-teaching purpose in mind, but mainly to communicate, inform and/or entertain.

However, materials that are especially written and scripted for language-teaching purposes to include certain functions or structures cannot be called authentic. Such materials are unlikely to be representative of natural language use, and may even make understanding more difficult (see 1.3.1).

Written language

The diagram in Focus 5 distinguishes between published and unpublished sources. A good coursebook should contain a variety of texts from published sources. For adults, these can be supplemented by extracts on topical issues from magazines, advice leaflets and newspapers (news cuttings can be also used in conjunction with recorded extracts from radio or TV news bulletins). For children, they can be supplemented by stories, activity books and reference books. Encourage extensive reading for pleasure. Sometimes a class library of short stories, magazines, children's story books and comics will help.

Unpublished sources include letters from pen-friends and data collected by students doing specialist project work. International links or twinning arrangements with schools and colleges in more than one country encourage information exchanges of all kinds between classes of similar-age learners.[2]

Advances in computer technology mean that the Internet is also becoming a useful resource. A whole range of text types is available; much of the material being spontaneous, unedited, and available without charge.[3] Some pairs of schools and colleges in different countries have established electronic mail (email) links to exchange information, or just pen-friend letters. Other institutions are exploring it for sources of up-to-date specialist information (e.g. medical 'bulletin boards') to download and print out for their ESP classes.

Material from all these sources can be made available for student use outside class time through a self-access centre or an open learning system, where texts and recordings are carefully classified and labelled.

5.2.3 Selection criteria for material

Here are some criteria that should be kept in mind; they are, however inextricably intertwined. Selecting a piece of material will involve considering all of them, and is often a delicate balancing act.

- **Exploitability:** Choose a piece of material that lends itself to classroom exploitation, i.e. to an engaging task, or series of tasks, that will probably sustain students' interest over a length of time (see 5.4).
- **Topic:** Variety is important – it is impossible to please every member of the class every time. However, an engaging task, with the right degree of challenge, will more than make up for a seemingly dull topic. An element of surprise or originality helps.
- **Length/chunk-ability:** Choose a short piece, or a longer one that has obvious 'pause' points, i.e. can be split into sections with a task set on each. This is far more productive in class than a long piece, even if it is more challenging, linguistically.

  With listening, length is also important. One minute of BBC World Service Radio contains around 200 words of running text, so a four-minute video extract could produce a text 800 words long, which is well over two pages of an average book.[4]

  We saw in Chapter 1 that quality of exposure is more likely to lead to effective learning than quantity. A short quality text, made more memorable by a satisfying task, is more likely to stick in learners' minds and provide a richer learning experience than a long, less engaging one. Ideally, we should aim at a mix of short and 'chunkable' longer texts.[5]
- **Linguistic complexity:** Try choosing occasional items where the language itself seems difficult but the general message is predictable and the genre is familiar, e.g. weather forecasts, sports reports. A simple task can be set that can be successfully achieved without the need to understand every idea.
- **Accessibility:** Is the text culturally accessible or will students need additional background knowledge to appreciate it? With Business English or other professional areas, students may need to know specific information, e.g. the type of organisation or its approach.
- **Copyright:** Check that you are not breaking copyright laws by copying and using the material in class, or by storing it afterwards.

If only one or two of the criteria above present a problem in a particular text,

it should still be possible and indeed rewarding to design an initial task that makes it accessible to students.

5.2.4 Grading the text or the task?

In daily life, we process text in different ways, depending on our purpose. This is also the case when we read, listen or view in a foreign language. Sometimes we can find out what we want to know without being able to understand anywhere near the whole text. And occasionally, though we do understand every word, message and meaning are not clear.

With TV and video, the visual information combined with our knowledge of the world often helps us to predict the content and, with the help of some key words, to make sense of a fairly complex piece. Conversely, following apparently simple written instructions, e.g. to set a video recorder, is often difficult even in our first language, because we don't have the technical knowledge the writer expected.

In the classroom, the teacher may well have to supply some of the relevant background knowledge beforehand, and, without giving too much away, ensure that the key words or concepts will be recognised by learners. This could happen in the pre-task phase (see 3.2.3). Task 3b) based on the *Spiders* text, on page 84, attempts to do this.

Let us briefly consider what linguistic features might make a text problematic for a reader who wants to gain an in-depth understanding of it.

Several types of readability studies exist, but these are based mainly on sentence and word length. They conclude that the longer sentences and words are, the harder the text is to understand fully.[6] However, there is some doubt that such studies are sufficient as an indicator. Many children can read the word 'elephant' long before they can manage more common, shorter words. Other factors which are likely to cause difficulty are:

- unknown words and phrases[7];
- common words used with metaphorical or less common meanings (students recognise the word, but don't realise it is being used in a different sense);
- complex phrase or clause structure. In English, for example, the noun group in journalistic and academic text can cause problems.

Some written texts are difficult to understand simply because they are badly written and consistently confound the reader's expectations. Perhaps they are badly signalled, or ambiguous. They may omit things that are necessary, or use uncommon words for effect. In other words, the weakness may not be that of the reader but that of the writer.

Even if the text in itself is linguistically difficult, the pedagogic level still depends on the extent to which its meaning has to be interpreted by the reader, and on the reader's prior knowledge of both the topic and genre of text.

Grading a text by attempting to assess its level makes no pedagogic sense, then, unless one knows the purpose for which the information is to be used. Text comprehensibility and task purpose are inseparable. The task defines the purpose for which the text needs to be understood.

The text selection criteria we considered in 5.2.3 above are also relevant when grading texts.

As a general rule, if the text is linguistically dense or complex, set an easy task, and follow it with others that encourage learners to focus on different aspects. If the text is easy, you can set more challenging tasks, for example understanding implications or inferences. It is more realistic to grade the tasks rather than the text.

5.3 Reading and listening strategies

This section examines the ways in which language learners read, and compares them with common strategies in mother-tongue reading. Listening requires different processing abilities from reading, even though there may be linguistic features in common. We then consider the importance of recognising natural patterns in text. These will give us some principles upon which to base task design, and help us to generate fresh ideas for tasks.

5.3.1 Reading

Unless learners are given a specific purpose for reading, they tend to see the text as a learning device and read one word at a time. When they come to a word they don't know, they stop to think about it or look it up. Often learners sub-vocalise, i.e. read the words in their heads. This gives them time to think about the phrasing and pronunciation, but means they read very slowly, and often fail to interpret the whole meaning.

'I understand all the words but I don't know what the writer is getting at' is a common complaint from learners reading a second language.[8] They will need to read the text two or three times to get even an approximate sense. All this takes time and many less motivated learners give up.

Motivated learners do seem to absorb a lot of language by reading very thoroughly. But to become efficient readers, they need to develop a more versatile range of reading habits. When listening to spoken language, words are already grouped together in phrases, with the message-bearing words stressed; in written text, such clues are missing. Readers need to work out which words belong together and form units of meaning – a 'phrasing' or 'chunking' process; they also need to recognise the key words and phrases.

Reading for meaning should become a priority, and they need to get used to the idea of sometimes reading for partial or approximate comprehension, rather than aiming at perfect understanding each time. We saw in Chapter 1 that people who tolerate ambiguity tend to be better language learners. Perhaps the same goes for toleration of approximate understanding.

As far as possible, the tasks set should encourage the kinds of language-processing behaviours students will need after their course, for example, reading for specific information. Reading word by word is unlikely to be among them.

Teachers sometimes read out loud while learners follow the words in their books. This may help learners initially with relating sounds to symbols, and phrasing and chunking, but in the long run, it may encourage inefficient reading habits. Silent reading for a specific purpose is far faster, more selective – there is no need to read every line or paragraph – and gives learners practice in recognising meaning units for themselves.

How do we normally read in our own language? When reading a newspaper, for example, we rarely start at line one and read every word in every line until the end. We flick through the pages (sometimes even back to front!), dipping into the text in the middle if something catches our attention. We look at the pictures or diagrams and try to make sense of them by reading selectively. (I would bet a

lot of money that you have already done the same with this book!) Finally, we choose the bits that suit our own specific purpose and read those in depth. If we are really keen, and have time, we might finally read the whole paper. And sometimes we might tell someone about what we are reading – summarising one aspect and very likely giving an evaluation of it. Talking about text is a common pastime.

5.3.2 Listening

Listening to lectures or the radio and viewing TV or video are slightly different from reading in that they have to be done in real time and in sequence. If you don't catch something first time, you can't go back or stop and ponder over it without missing the next bit (unless you are watching a video or listening to a tape).

This can be a problem in lessons. When listening to recordings in class, some learners panic, get left behind and give up. After a few times, they stop trying. This is bad news, because they are cutting themselves off from a vast source of exposure.

Carefully designed tasks on well-chosen texts can prevent this happening. Just as we encourage learners to speak and experiment with ways of saying what they mean, no matter what mistakes they make, we should also be encouraging them to listen, predict and make guesses about meanings without penalising wrong ones. Just as, when appropriate, we accept approximate renderings of meaning, we should also accept approximate interpretations of meaning. Rather than correcting a misinterpretation, we should find ways of giving learners an incentive to listen to or read the text again, and work at improving their comprehension for themselves. This is what a good task, or series of tasks, aims to do.

But learners should also be encouraged to make do with a very approximate understanding, and train themselves to keep listening for key words and other clues to meaning and direction. This is far more useful in the long run than becoming dependent on artificially slow clear speech. Overcoming the difficulties of coping with natural input at the beginning is largely a matter of task design.

5.3.3 Awareness of patterns in text

One strategy that helps learners find their way through a reading text, or, if listening, to pick up the thread of an argument after getting lost, is recognising particular patterns and the words or phrases that signal them.

Just as sentences have a range of typical patterns, so do stretches of language above the level of the sentence. These are sometimes called higher-order patterns or macro-structures in discourse and can have explicit linguistic markers.

Learners need to be able to recognise and exploit these patterns to improve their reading and listening comprehension and to help them organise text clearly and logically. Examples of six of these patterns follow.

Situation – problem – solution – evaluation

I read recently about a traffic problem in a village high street. The report began with a description of the street (situation), then explained that speeding cars had caused accidents resulting in severe injuries (problem). It proposed that a set of traffic-calming measures be installed (solution), stating that this would be

comparatively cheap and had proved effective elsewhere (evaluation). This is a common text pattern.

Sometimes, however, it can be more complex. If the first solution proposed (e.g. to build a by-pass) is no good, the evaluation will be negative (too costly, uses valuable land) and another solution will be put forward, followed by another evaluation. So then we have: situation – problem – solution 1 – evaluation (negative) – solution 2 – evaluation (positive). The problem or solution can also be elaborated on, for example, by explaining causes, reasons, procedures.

In written English, the problem is often signalled by *but*. In spoken English, it may be signalled by expressions like *The thing is ... Trouble was ...* and the solution by *So what he did was, he ...* .

Sequential

Stories, anecdotes and descriptions of processes often follow a sequential pattern. In spoken English this is typically signalled by a series of *and thens*. Written or planned text tends to contain a wider variety of time phrases to signal sequential patterns, such as *eventually, after three weeks, later*. With a process, you might find *First, then,* and *finally*. In spoken language, you may hear *Well, the first thing is... / What usually happens next is...* but sometimes, explicit signals are omitted, and must be inferred.

General – specific

Often a general concept will be illustrated by an example, or a general word, like 'traffic', followed by a more specific item, like 'speeding cars'. Although Rachel's account of her rough sea journey (see 2.3.1) might have seemed fairly unstructured, a closer look shows a consistent patterning. She points out that in general she's a good traveller – it was on this specific occasion she was ill. She describes the journey first, then gives specific details of the conditions in the boat. She mentions her family in general before focusing specifically on her brother.

Topic – elaboration

When writing, we introduce a new topic or new angle on an old topic by using titles and headings, or stating the next main theme or argument.

When talking, we often announce the topic before giving more details. Two examples from the 'Spot the differences' interaction in 2.3.1 are:

David: *How about the television? Is that on or off?*
David: *So, the sign... What shall we say for that?*

Main facts – supporting details

Newspaper reports typically begin with a paragraph that gives most of the main facts of the story, often in one sentence, for example, *A mother and her three daughters died yesterday when fire swept through their house in Greater Manchester.*

The subsequent paragraphs then flesh out the details: the ages of the children, how the fire started, rescue attempts and so on. This is the pattern followed in the *Cold store* report on page 106.

Hypothesis – evidence – conclusion

This pattern is commonly used when reporting research. For example, a recent project set out to investigate a possible link between unemployment levels and the rise in crime. The report began with the hypothesis that poverty and boredom due to unemployment drive young people to criminal activities. It continued by presenting evidence from various sources. It ended with the conclusion that there was indeed a link, and that the government should act accordingly.

However, texts rarely follow just one of these patterns. The *Spiders* text has situation – problem – solution as a higher-order pattern within which a sequential pattern describes the steps of the solution.

Awareness of these patterns can help learners a lot. For example, if they have just had a lapse of concentration in a lecture and suddenly hear the words *Now, one possible solution might be to...* they know they have missed at least the end of a description of a problem, and can guess that this solution will get a negative evaluation. They also know that they should listen for details of another solution. If learners can predict where the text is leading, and identify what they have missed, at least they can ask someone afterwards.

Awareness of these patterns can also help us as teachers and materials writers. If we start by identifying the predominant patterns in each text, we can design better tasks. Recognising the main parts of the higher-order pattern is useful when dividing a text, for example. And if we can devise tasks that highlight patterns, students will certainly find this helpful both when completing set tasks, and when reading or listening independently.

5.4 Designing text-based tasks

All text-based tasks aim to encourage natural and efficient reading/listening/viewing strategies, focusing initially on retrieval of sufficient relevant meaning for the purpose of the task. This will entail both holistic processing, i.e. gaining an overall impression, and picking up detailed linguistic clues: a combination of what are commonly called 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' processes.

Later, in the language focus phase of the TBL framework, learners will examine the language forms in the text and look in detail at the use and meaning of lexical items that they have noticed (see Chapter 7).

There is a range of task designs that can be applied to texts. In this section we shall illustrate six and give examples of ways to adapt them.

Designs for text-based tasks

Prediction tasks	• from headline and early text • from selected parts of text • from pictures or video with/without words or sound track
Jumbles	• jumbled sections of text • jumbled key points of a summary • jumbled pictures from a series
Restoration tasks	• identifying words/phrases/sentences omitted from or added to a text
Jigsaw/split information tasks	• Each student in a group reads/hears a different part of a whole text or researches an

	angle of a theme. These are then combined to form a whole.
Comparison tasks	• two accounts of the same incident/event • a diagram/picture to compare with a written account/description
Memory challenge tasks	• After a single brief exposure to the text, students list/describe/write quiz questions about what they can remember to show other pairs.

You will no doubt already be familiar with some of these tasks; many are to be found in good textbooks, and some are similar to those in Chapter 2.

Sometimes you may need to use two, or even three different types of task consecutively. If the first requires only a rapid processing of the text, students will naturally want a second chance to understand more of it. If one task is particularly challenging (like the 'lost sentence' one for *Spiders* in Focus 5), you may want an easier one to familiarise students with the text first.

Task designs can also be combined, for example, prediction based on sequencing jumbled pictures in the *Spiders* tasks 3b), c) and d) on page 84.

In the final event you need to select or design tasks that motivate your students: that make them want to read, hear and learn from the available exposure, and that encourage them to develop a variety of effective reading and listening strategies. Sometimes you will need to copy and cut up a text. Sometimes retyping is necessary. However, your efforts are likely to be rewarded. The level of student engagement and quality of learning stimulated by such preparation are usually quite evident. With the task designs suggested below, students usually want to read the text, or listen again, or solve the problem and complete the task to their satisfaction. And this is ultimately what counts. If they have enjoyed tackling the text because of your tasks, they are more likely to read, listen and watch videos on their own in future. Each task successfully completed is a step on the road to learner independence.

I will now give more detail for each task design, then highlight the type of text they work especially well with.

5.4.1 Prediction tasks

Students predict or attempt to reconstruct the content on the basis of given clues from part of the text, without having read, heard or seen the whole.

a *Predicting news stories*

Task A in Focus 5 (based on the *Cold store* story) asked you to do this from the headline and first lines. So, having written your seven questions, ask yourself if they are all likely to be answered in the full report. Revise them if necessary. Finally, read the rest of the text on page 106 to see how many of your questions were answered. Most people find around four.

Now reflect on how you read the report. Did you read it word for word? Were there bits you skipped? How did you manage to pick so many questions that were answered in the text without actually reading it first? Your knowledge of the genre of news stories probably helped. Factual reporting means the article has to reveal more information about the 'schoolboy', e.g. his age, which gives your predictions a basis. This process has implications for learning. You were

probably quite keen to read the full text to see how many of your questions were answered, i.e. you had a very specific purpose, and one you were involved in creating – they were your own questions (compare this with reading a text followed by comprehension questions set by a teacher). If you also had to check your partner's questions, you probably read the text twice, focusing on slightly different parts and skipping what was familiar. When reading through the other task designs in this section, choose a second task that would give learners a new reason for reading the *Cold store* (and *Spiders*) texts again, more thoroughly, for meaning.

Notice how many of the main facts were given in those first few lines. This text illustrates one of the patterns listed in 5.3.3: Main facts – supporting details. This is what makes it so suitable for a prediction task.

To make it easier, you could give a few more lines from the first paragraph, or supply dictionary definitions of key words, or do a pre-task brainstorming activity on ways of keeping warm in a very cold place.

b *Predicting problem solutions, story endings, poem themes*

Using a text with a situation – problem – solution – evaluation pattern (see page 73), you could:

- let students read/hear/watch only the parts which give the situation and problem, and let pairs work out two or three alternative solutions of their own, then evaluate another pair's solutions. When they have presented their best solutions to each other during a report phase, ask the class to predict which solutions are mentioned in the original text. They finally read/hear/watch the whole piece and compare and evaluate.

Using a sequential text (see page 74), you could:

- give students most of it and ask them to write an ending.
- give the ending, and ask them to write the beginning. Giving them a few carefully chosen words from the text (not all key words, and not all nouns!) may make it easier.
- get them to hear/read a video/an illustrated children's story/a series of instructions without seeing the pictures, and then ask them to suggest ideas for visuals.
- or, with the same sources, show them the video images (no sound)/pictures/diagrams first, and get them to guess what the text will say at each stage.

Using a poem, you could:

- write lines on the board, one at a time, not necessarily in order. After each line, ask what the poem could be about. Accept everyone's ideas, giving no indication as to which ideas are closest to the original. If students get too frustrated, give them a line containing more clues. Stop when they get near the actual theme and let them read the whole poem. This is fun to do as a whole class exercise.
- give the first few lines, and maybe the last line, and ask students in pairs to describe the circumstances behind the poem as they imagine them.

Make sure students don't feel they have failed if they predict something entirely different from the original text. Sometimes their ideas are even better; they are often equally interesting and viable.

NB: Prediction tasks are difficult to present in a coursebook, because some students will have read ahead and know what is coming.

Be sure to give enough clues! Only a headline or title to predict from allows students very little to work on. It encourages random, unmotivated guesses, which are often over in a few seconds, and bear little resemblance to the target text. There is little or no linguistic challenge. It is far better to give a range of clues that provide this and look intriguing.

5.4.2 Jumbles

Learners are presented with sections or parts of a complete text, but in the wrong order. They have to read or hear each part and decide in which order they would be best. Sequencing often requires quite deep linguistic processing of parts of the text, and an appreciation of the coherence of the whole meaning.

The text pattern that lends itself most obviously to this type of task is the sequential one.

- Where an account of a process/a set of instructions/a narrative is accompanied by diagrams/pictures, you could jumble either the text or the visuals. This involves matching text to visuals (see page 84).
- With listening or viewing materials (which are difficult to play in the wrong order), you could use a jumbled summary of the content or a jumbled list of main points (perhaps minus the ending) instead.[9]

Using texts that follow a general – specific pattern or a topic – elaboration pattern (see page 74), you could:

- split up the general/topic statements from the accompanying specific elaboration statements and jumble them. You might need to leave the first and last paragraph intact, to give students sufficient context.
- jumble headlines from short 'News in brief' items and ask students to read the items and select the headline that fits best. To make this more challenging, add two or three extra headlines on similar themes. Since headlines often use words with several alternative meanings, a dictionary exercise could be set at the pre-task phase to help students predict these.

Using a poem, you could:

- either mix up whole verses, or lines within verses.

NB: Jumbles can be frustrating if texts are divided into too many sections. Before you finalise the task for class use, try it out on someone who has not read or heard the text.

Jumbles are rarely suitable for newspaper reports as events are seldom written in sequence.

Always give students credit for arriving at a possible ordering, even if this is not the original order.

5.4.3 Restoration tasks

Students replace words or phrases that have been omitted from a text, or identify an extra sentence or paragraph that has been put in.

The aim here is for the student to restore the text to its original state. Although the omissions or additions are normally selected by the teacher, there is no reason why groups of students should not make their own, and give them to other groups. This could make an excellent class revision exercise, with each group working on a familiar text.

a *Omissions*

Omitting words/phrases from a written text, you could:

- put them into a box above the text (preferably with one or two extra words/phrases, so that students cannot do the restoration without thinking) and ask students to find where they fit. Leave gaps.
- make an even more challenging task by omitting some carefully selected phrases and retyping the text closing up the gaps. This way, a far more detailed reading will be required. Such a task is best preceded by one that gives students a general idea of what the text is about.

The choice of words to omit depends on the aims of the task. For example, some of the new words that students may not know could be removed or blacked out completely. Ask students to summarise the story with the words missing. This will prove they do not have to understand every word to do the task. Another way would be to remove phrases crucial to the story line, leaving gaps. On the basis of what they've read, learners speculate which phrase could be in each gap.

Omitting a single sentence, you could:

- put it underneath the text and close up the gap. If you have picked a good sentence, students will have to read quite carefully to find where it fits best (see Task B in Focus 5).

b *Additions*

Adding an extra sentence to the original text, you could:

- ask students to spot the stranger. It will need to be fairly well disguised, for example, by containing some of the same lexis as the text, but should not make sense in the context. For example, in the *Cold store* text on page 106, you could add the sentence *Even the butcher himself was freezing cold* in the middle of paragraph three.

Adding another text of a similar length on a similar topic but from a different genre, you could:

- merge the two for students to read and separate the paragraphs into the two original texts. For example, this could be done by finding a text about spiders from a children's encyclopaedia, splitting it into four or five short sections and inserting it into the *Spiders* text. (You would obviously need to retype the merged texts.) This task would be more suitable for higher-level students.

c *Tabularised information*

Using a separate table/flow chart/diagram summarising the main points of the text or programme extract, you could:

- omit some points (and jumble them below) or add a specific number of extra points. Students begin by discussing the points, and trying to identify which fit where, or which might not fit. They then read/listen/watch to confirm their predictions.

5.4.4 Jigsaw tasks

The aim is for students to make a whole from different parts, each part being held by a different person or taken from a different source.

Students read/listen to/view their section, and report to the others what it contains. They then discuss how it all fits together. The final product is either the

reassembled text or a new piece containing the synthesised information written by the group or presented orally.

Using a text with a situation – problem – solution – evaluation pattern (see page 73), you could:

- split it into four or more sections (depending on how many solutions are offered and evaluated, and how these are organised within the text), to make a small-scale task.
- make such tasks into large-scale projects, for example, to produce a report on a specific aspect of a country by compiling information from different sources such as interviews, reference books, travel brochures and TV documentaries (for more ideas see Appendix A, Type 6: Creative tasks).

Using a recording you could:

- do a split listening task, where the whole class hears the same recording, but different groups must listen for different information or to a different person. Then they are asked to pool what they can remember and summarise the content, having been given a set number of points to include. (This makes them sift and evaluate the points they have retrieved.) The same technique can also be used for quick dictation of a whole text or conversation.

Using a video, you could:

- do a split viewing task, where half the class turn their backs to the video, while the other half view normally. They would then pool and summarise the information as above.

For students to complete all jigsaw tasks to their satisfaction and bring them to the standard needed for the report phase, they will need to read/hear/view the sources several times after the initial task is completed. They may then have a natural desire to read or hear each other's sources, too, to check their information. This naturally increases their exposure and experience of language.

5.4.5 Comparison tasks

These are similar to the tasks described in Chapter 2.3.1 and Appendix A Type 3. Instead of spotting the differences between two pictures, learners compare two (or more) similar texts to spot factual or attitudinal differences, or to find points in common.

Using different accounts of the same incident/different descriptions of the same picture or person, you could:

- ask students to read about each others' experiences of school to find and list points that they have in common.

Using a single event covered by different media, e.g. a news story and a broadcast recording or the same news story from two different newspapers, you could:

- ask students to list the points in common or spot the differences.

Using a report/review of a video extract, you could:

- incorporate two pieces of false or additional information that were not in the original extract. Students then compare the report/review with the extract itself.

5.4.6 Memory challenge tasks

Speed is of the essence here. These tasks are based on the fact that different people will notice and remember different things from a text they have read fast (set a time limit!), or from a recorded extract they have heard or watched only once. You may, when doing them, decide to cut right down on the pre-task phase,

because you will get a greater divergence of impressions if students do it 'cold' the first time.

After a single, brief exposure to the text, depending on the content, you could ask pairs to do one of these things:

- list a specific number of ideas/things they remembered best (and why). When reporting these, they find out how many people chose the same ones, and why.
- describe in as much detail as possible one place/person mentioned/shown in the extract.
- write three (or more) quiz questions about the text that they are sure they can answer correctly. They then ask other pairs their questions.
- with TV adverts on video, list the images on screen, in the right order, and then link them with what they can recall of the text.

After the report phase, (so long as the teacher does not give away the correct answers) the class will naturally want to read, see, or hear the piece again, perhaps several times, to see who remembered the best, and whose first impressions were the most accurate (or strangest).

5.5 Planning a text-based task lesson

The task framework can be used flexibly as a planning tool to enable students to get the most benefits from text-based tasks.

When using texts of any kind, the pre-task phase may involve a quick study of the title or a small extract, or words and phrases from them. The task cycle may take a bit longer, depending on the length of the text or recording. The balance can also be changed slightly; there may be less emphasis on the planning and reporting components, to give more time for the reading and listening. There may be two or even three task cycles arising out of one text, each giving different insights into its meaning.

A sample outline for a lesson beginning with a prediction task follows. Note what teacher and learners do at each stage. Each phase begins with general instructions and is followed by a section of a specific lesson plan based on the *Cold store* text on page 106.

Sample lesson outline for text-based tasks

Pre-task

Teacher introduces topic, source of text, its original purpose, characters, and other relevant information to set scene and activate learners' prior knowledge, using background material if suitable.

Tell class about the coldest day you remember.
Ask: *What's the coldest you have ever been? Where? Why?*
Brainstorm on words/phrases expressing cold, including *cold store/freezer.*
Brainstorm on ways to keep warm.

Task cycle

Task 1

Teacher sets up initial task for students to do in pairs, e.g. prediction task based on extract from text/video programme.
Teacher helps with meanings of key words and phrases if asked.
Pairs discuss predictions.

Write headline and first lines (up to *accidentally*) on board.
Ask pairs to write down five questions they'd like answers to.

Planning and report 1

Students plan brief oral report for whole class, to compare predictions.
Teacher encourages but does not reveal whose predictions are closest.

Pairs tell each other the questions they thought of. Discuss possible answers.
Let pairs now write seven questions they are sure will be answered in the story.

First full exposure

Students read whole text/hear or view recorded material once or twice, to see how close predictions were.
Teacher chairs general feedback on content. (Avoid detailed explanation at this point – students may resolve own problems during the second task.)

Pairs read whole *Cold store* story to find how many of their questions were answered.
Ask how many got 7/7, 6/7, 5/7, etc.

Task 2

Teacher sets second task of different type, e.g. memory challenge. Without reading/hearing/viewing again, pairs list specific number of points, events, etc. in order they were mentioned or happened, or pairs prepare list of quiz questions for other pairs to answer from memory.

Either

Memory challenge: Pairs turn texts over. List six or seven things that happened in chronological order. Start from *At the end of the afternoon's work in the butcher's shop, Peter went into the cold store.*

Or

Memory challenge: Pairs prepare six or seven quiz questions to give another pair to answer from memory.

Planning and report 2

Pairs tell/ask other pairs, exchange lists or report to whole class.
Teacher encourages but does not reveal solutions.

Either

Pairs read each other's lists and complete their own.

Or

Pairs answer each other's questions and see how many they get right.

Second full exposure

All students read/hear/view again, once or twice, to check what they have written, and see which pairs remembered most. General feedback.

Either

Pairs read text again, to check facts and find anything else that could go in list.

Or

Pairs read text again, to check answers they got wrong.

Writing task: Plan and write a summary of the story consisting of exactly 60 words.

Not all cycles will be precisely the same since they depend on the type of task.

Once the task is set up, the role of the teacher is very much that of facilitator, encouraging students to process the text for themselves, and to help each other understand it sufficiently to do the task. It is the learners who should be doing all the work. At the end of the last report stage, the teacher can chair a summing-

up or evaluation session, before focusing on language.

The next and final phase in the task framework is language focus, with analysis and practice components, which give learners chances to take a closer look at the language forms in the text. These components will be described in Chapter 7.

5.6 Summary

The task designs described in the main section of this chapter complement the tasks described in Chapter 2. The aim of these two chapters has been to provide a wide repertoire of task types and designs. The examples in this chapter are based on written or spoken texts, and require learners to apply their real-world knowledge and experience to assign meaning to what they see, hear or read.

Tasks based on text motivate learners to read or listen for a particular purpose. Each time they do so, they interact with the text in a slightly different way, and retrieve different kinds of meanings according to the task goals. This process offers a variety of learning opportunities, and it is essential that the texts chosen form altogether a representative sample of the target language the students will later need.

We saw in Chapter 1 that exposure is vital for language learning. Its overall quality and quantity must be carefully appraised. The language contained in some textbooks fails to offer a fair sample of the target language as a whole. To help counteract this, and to broaden students' experience of language, this chapter has offered an overview of possible sources of suitable written and spoken material and listed criteria for its selection. It has presented some common text patterns, and given guidelines for the design of a range of text-based tasks, all of which should motivate learners to read and listen and employ a range of strategies in doing so. The final section illustrates how the task-based framework can help in the planning of text-based lessons, and clarifies what teachers and learners do at each stage.

Material appraisal

1 Appraising language exposure – see 5.2.1
Choose a coursebook that might be suitable for students you know. Go through it quickly to appraise the amount and range of language, both written and spoken, which it contains. Does it offer learners a relevant balance of language experience? What kinds of language and types of texts are lacking?

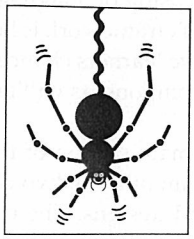
2 Appraising external sources of exposure – see 5.2.2
Even if you are not in a place where the target language is commonly used, think how many possible sources you/your learners have available.

3 Grading tasks – see 5.2.3, 5.2.4
Here are four tasks based on the *Spiders* text in Focus 5. Which would provide the easiest route to understanding the text and finding out how the woman was cured: a), b), c) or d)? Which might be the least effective task in providing learning opportunities? Why?

Read the Introduction about the TOP group and the first paragraph only of the text. Then either:

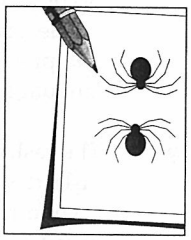
a) Together think of three ways the TOP group could help this woman. Exchange ideas with other pairs. Select four ideas you think might appear in the text, then read the text to see if you guessed correctly.

a living spider in a jar

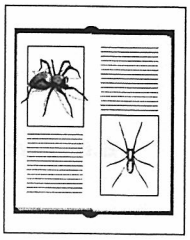


a toy spider

afraid of spiders



drawings of spiders on a note-pad



pictures of spiders in a book

or

b) In pairs, look carefully at the five pictures, and read the captions. The pictures show the stages in which the woman was cured of her phobia about spiders. What order do you think they should be in?

or

c) The same task as b) above, but without captions to the pictures.

or

d) The same task as b) above, but with captions using words and phrases from the text (i.e. 'doodles' instead of 'drawings').

4 Reading strategies – see 5.3.1

Find some written texts either in a textbook or other sources, and see what kinds of tasks you could use from this chapter that would encourage learners to read for meaning. If possible, try them out in class and observe the kind of strategies students use to do the tasks.

5 a) Try to observe people reading, in and out of class. Do they read in a linear fashion?

b) Interview some good language learners in a class you know. Ask them to think about how they read and to tell you in a later session. What advice would they give to other learners who want to improve their reading?

6 Listening strategies – see 5.3.2

a) Examine the listening materials used in conjunction with a course you know. How would the balance suit students you know?

b) Find an extract of spontaneous speech with a transcript, and devise two tasks you could use to encourage students to listen with involvement. Try them out in class, and get learners' feedback.

7 Task design – see 5.4

If you can get permission to use them in class, record some TV advertisements, preferably ones that students may not know, in the target language. Satellite channels are good for this. Would one be useful for memory challenge tasks? Which ones? Would one be useful for split viewing or predicting?

8 Try out two or three different text-based task cycles with one class. You may need to add some language-focused work afterwards (see Chapter 7). After each task, get students to reflect on what they did and write some feedback for you. They could either complete sentences like:
I found this task (easy/boring/hard/interesting).
I talked (a lot / a bit / not as much as I wanted to).

or you could ask them to write three things they liked about the lesson or two suggestions for improvements.

9 Look through resource books (three good ones are: R Holme, 1991 *Talking Texts* Longman; A Duff and A Maley, 1990 *Literature* OUP; Bassnett, S McGuire and P Grundy, 1993 *Language through literature* Longman) and observe the range of texts and tasks they suggest. How many fall into the task categories offered in this chapter and Appendix A?
Can you find any additional types of task that would motivate your learners to process texts purposefully?

Further reading

For the range of text types available and for ways of exploiting them for teaching language, see G Cook, 1989.
For more on teaching, see F Grellet, 1981, C Nuttall, 1996, J Richards, 1990, Chapter 5 or C Wallace, 1992.
For more on listening, see A Alderson and T Lynch, 1988, and J Richards, 1990, Chapter 3.
For an excellent summary of task types suitable for literary texts called 'Ten generative procedures for developing language activities', see A Duff and A Maley, 1991, pp. 157–65.

Notes

1 See M Legutke and H Thomas, 1991 on a secondary school in Germany who used their local airport as a rich source of language data.
2 Classes could exchange written materials, audio and perhaps even short video recordings on any variety of local and international topics. Language teaching magazines often have a 'wanted' column for pen-friends/school links.
3 The Internet address: http://lwww.les.aston.ac.uk/ext ling.html will give you a menu to start exploring what is available for language teachers.
4 Other criteria for the selection of video material should include visual interest/appeal; for example, if the screen only shows 'talking heads', there is very little to exploit on the visual side, other than personal expression, lip and body movements, etc. See M Allan, 1982, p. 22.
5 This is not to say that long texts or whole programmes are not useful exposure. They are, if they are moderately comprehensible. Reading and viewing for pleasure can, however, be done out of class. Here we are thinking of making the most of limited classroom time, which is often expensive for the student.
6 D Crystal, 1992, p. 372 describes American research which has produced a formula for calculating the 'fog index' of a text.
7 More than one unknown word in twenty is likely to render a text frustratingly difficult (P Meara, 1993).
8 When you were at school, do you remember reading a foreign language text out loud in your best pronunciation? And then realising at the end that you had hardly any idea of what it meant?
9 Actually making the summary of the video extract or listening text, and deciding how to jumble it would have to be done beforehand. Perhaps this could be set as a task for a higher level class to do in groups, trying the jumbled versions out on each other afterwards.