# Task-based learning for beginners – a lexical approach

**Jane Willis          IATEFL Cardiff 2009          www.willis-elt.co.uk**

**Task-based learning involves <u>meaning-focused interactions</u> – teacher with class, learners with learners. <u>Words and phrases</u> are vital for getting meanings across successfully, and <u>success</u> is the key to motivation. I will start by demonstrating some tasks suitable for beginners which illustrate six basic principles in TBL. In pairs, brainstorm some parallel tasks suitable for your learners.**

## Six Principles

**1 Start with words and phrases they know and build around them.**
**Brainstorming task**: International words of English
**Purposes**: to show learners how much they know already; to help them adapt their pronunciation. Also to encourage them to go on 'collecting' English words from outside sources.

**2 Lots of exposure to spoken English – teacher talk is good, interaction is vital.**
**Task**: classifying words and phrases, extending categories and talking about them.
**Purposes**: to help learners notice key words in the stream of speech; to begin to familiarise them with new language in a meaningful context – language they will need later in the teaching sequence or meet later in written form in their text book.

**3 Engage learners – set precise tasks with clear goals and minimal speaking.**
**Task**: sequencing/ordering e.g. alphabet dictation (names); classifying alphabet letters according to vowel sounds; matching (e.g. towns to countries to languages).
**Purposes**: to allow learners to experience success in achieving the goals; to show that achieving the task outcome is more important than achieving linguistic perfection

**4 Have fun – use number games, guessing games, memory challenges, sing songs.**
**Tasks**: Bingo (numbers and words), Odd word out, What's in my bag?  The Tray Challenge, Picture Hide and Seek.
**Purposes**: to recycle language in different ways; to show that learning English can be enjoyable; to create a relaxed atmosphere in class.

**5 Empower learners** – wherever possible, **give them choices** (of what? or how?).
**Task**: survey of clothes and colours – learners bring items of clothing from home and/or pictures from magazines rather than stick to text book pictures. Also, learners can create their own questionnaires, quiz questions, test items, feed-back forms, blogs.
**Purposes**: to redress the balance of power in the classroom; to generate a spirit of co-operation; to show you can use the text book flexibly and not be boring!

**6 Be positive about your learners' contributions** – accept, recast and extend.
**Purposes**: to show that you value what they offer; to encourage learners to activate and use and extend whatever English they have; to recognise that mistakes are a necessary part of language development.  Feeling a sense of success at getting meaning across is paramount; success breeds motivation. Failure kills it.
**But note that a typical TBL lesson will end a task sequence with a focus on form.**

# Task-based learning for teenage beginners – a lexical approach

Jane Willis          IATEFL Cardiff 2009          www.willis-elt.co.uk

Task-based learning involves <u>meaning-focused interactions</u> – teacher with class, learners with learners. <u>Words and phrases</u> are vital for getting meanings across successfully, and <u>success</u> is the key to <u>motivation</u>. I will start by demonstrating some tasks suitable for beginners which illustrate six basic principles in TBL.
>In pairs, brainstorm some parallel tasks, specifically for <u>your</u> learners.

## Six principles, sample tasks and their pedagogic purposes

**1 Start with words and phrases they know and build around them**.
**Brainstorming task**:  International words of English
**Purposes**: 1.
2.

**2 Lots of exposure to spoken English – teacher talk is good, interaction is vital.**
**Task**: classifying words and phrases, extending categories and talking about them.
**Purposes**: 1.
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**3 Engage learners – set precise tasks with clear goals and minimal speaking**.
**Task**: sequencing/ordering e.g. alphabet dictation (names); classifying alphabet letters according to vowel sounds, matching (e.g. towns to countries to languages).
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**5 Empower learners** – wherever possible, **give them a choice** (of what? or how?).
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**Purposes**: 1
2.
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**Purposes**: 1.
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**But note that a typical TBL lesson will end a task sequence with a focus on form.**