

Teacher's tips

Making tasks work

1 Treat tasks primarily as an opportunity for communication

Some of the tasks in this course may be familiar: the difference is in how they are treated. The main objective is for students to use the language that they know (and if necessary learn new language) in order to achieve a particular communicative goal, not to 'practise' specific language. Although it is virtually impossible to perform some of the tasks without using the language introduced in Part A of the module, in others students may choose to use this language only once or twice, or not at all. Do not try to 'force-feed' it. Of course, if learners are seeking this language but have forgotten it, this is the ideal moment to remind them!

2 Make the task suit your class

Students using this course will vary in age, background, interests and ability. All these students need to find the tasks motivating and 'do-able', yet challenging at the same time. Do not be afraid to adapt the tasks to suit your class if this helps. The teacher's notes contain suggestions on how to adapt certain tasks for monolingual and multilingual groups, students of different ages and interests, large classes, and weaker or stronger groups. There are also ideas for shortening tasks, or dividing them over two shorter lessons. We hope these suggestions will give you other ideas of your own on how to adapt the tasks.

3 Experiment with where you use the task within the module

We have placed the tasks at the same place in each module, but this does not mean that teachers always need to follow this order when doing the tasks. Other possibilities are:

- to do the task before the 'language' part of the module: this is particularly appropriate if students claim that they 'already know' the grammar, and will help you to assess for yourself whether they need any more input on the language point being covered. You may find that you can omit some of the *Language focus* sections, pick out certain parts of them, or just set some practice exercises or reading through the appropriate section of the *Language summary* for 'revision' homework.
- to do the Task link before the task: the *Task links* focus on phrases or minor structures that relate directly to the task (for example, *Making recommendations* for the task in which students plan a tour of their country/region). Often a few phrases relating to the language area covered in the *Task links* are included in the *Useful*

language boxes, but you may prefer to look at the language area in more detail before students do the task.

There may be other ways in which you wish to change the order of the material in each module – the important thing is to do the task at a point when you feel your students will be most motivated and best able to do it.

4 Personalise it!

All the tasks in *Cutting Edge Intermediate* have a model or stimulus to introduce them. Sometimes these are recordings of people talking about something personal, such as a childhood memory or an object of value to them. However, finding out about you, their teacher, may be more motivating for some students, so you could try providing a personalised model instead. If you do this, remember to:

- plan what you are going to say, but do not write it out word for word, as this may sound unnatural.
- bring in any photos or illustrations you can to help to bring your talk alive.
- either pre-teach or explain as you go along any problematic vocabulary.
- give students something to do as they are listening (the teacher's notes give suggestions on this where appropriate).

This approach may take a little courage at first, but students are likely to appreciate the variety it provides.

5 Set the final objective clearly before students start preparing

Do not assume that students will work out where their preparations are leading if you do not tell them! Knowing, for example, that their film review will be recorded for a class radio programme may make a big difference to how carefully they prepare it.

6 Give students time to think and plan

Planning time is very important if students are to produce the best language that they are capable of. It is particularly useful for building up the confidence of students who are normally reluctant to speak in class. The amount of time needed will vary from task to task, from about five to twenty minutes.

This planning time will sometimes mean a period of silence in class, something that teachers used to noisy, communicative classrooms can find unnerving. Remember that just because you cannot hear anything, it does not mean that nothing is happening!

It may help to relieve any feelings of tension at this stage by playing some background music, or, if practical in your school, suggest that students go somewhere else to prepare – another classroom if one is available.

Students may well find the idea of 'time to plan' strange at first, but, as with many other teaching and learning techniques, it is very much a question of training.

7 Respond to students' individual language needs

As students are preparing, it is important that you make it clear that they can ask you about language queries, so that when they perform the task they are able to say what they personally want to say.

(See *Teacher's tips: responding to learners' individual language needs* on pages 10–11.)

8 Feed in 'useful language'

Although the task should not be seen as an opportunity to 'practise' discrete items, you may find that there is specific language that would be useful in order to perform the task successfully. One way of deciding whether this is the case is to do the task yourself first (without any preconceptions of what language you 'should' use) and noticing what language you use. You may be surprised to find that it is language not usually taught in English-language courses.

USEFUL LANGUAGE BOXES

Each task is accompanied by a *Useful language* box containing phrases which can be adapted by individual students to express different ideas and opinions, rather than anything very specific. The phrases included were selected after trying out the tasks a number of times with 'real' classes. Sometimes the *Useful language* boxes include structures which have not yet been covered in the grammar syllabus. However, the examples used can be taught simply as phrases – it is not intended that you should launch into major grammatical presentations here!

The phrases in the *Useful language* boxes can be dealt with at different points in the lesson:

- before students start their preparation for the task.
- during the preparation phase on an individual basis.
- after the task in the feedback stage.

(See *Teacher's tips: responding to learners' individual language needs*, number 8 on page 11.)

9 Give students an opportunity to 'rehearse'

This will not be necessary for the simpler tasks, but for more complicated tasks, or with less confident students, it can make a big difference. It will help fluency, encourage students to be more ambitious with their language, and

possibly iron out some of their errors. This rehearsal stage can take various forms:

- students tell their story, etc. in pairs before telling it in groups or to the whole class.
- students discuss issues in groups before discussing them as a class.
- students go over what they are going to say 'silently' in their heads (either during the lesson, or at home if the task is split over two lessons).

10 Insist that students do the task in English!

It may not be realistic to prevent students from using their own language completely, but they should understand that during the performance of the task (if not in the planning stage, where they may need their mother tongue to ask for new language) they must use English. At the beginning of the course, it may be useful to discuss with your class the importance of this, and the best ways of implementing it. (See *Learner-training worksheet 1* on pages 104–105 of the *Resource bank*.)

Students will be more tempted to use their own language if they find the task daunting, so do not be afraid to shorten or simplify tasks if necessary. However, planning and rehearsal time will make students less inclined to use their first language.

11 Try increasing the 'pressure' on students

A teacher's first priority is to improve students' confidence with the language. At the beginning of the course, this may mean putting students under as little pressure as possible (for example, by doing tasks in groups rather than in front of the whole class). As time goes on, however, a certain amount of pressure can sometimes improve the quality of language students produce. This can be done in the following ways:

- by getting students to give their talk, report, etc. standing up in front of the whole class.
- by recording or videoing their performance of the task and re-playing it to them later.
- by making it clear that you will be correcting any errors they make at the end of the task.

12 Make notes for further input and correction after the task

Before or during the performance of the task, you may notice errors and gaps in students' knowledge that you want to look at. It is usually best not to interrupt the flow of the task, but be prepared to make a note of these points to cover later on.

(See *Teacher's tips: responding to learners' individual language needs* on pages 10–11.)