Communication Activities

The aim of communication activities is to encourage **purposeful** and **meaningful** interaction between students. Tasks should be designed so that students have a **reason** or a **purpose** for speaking. They should be asking for or giving **real information** or finding out about the **opinion** of their classmates. Such activities reflect real-life communication and are motivating for students to carry out.

Common Communicative Tasks to Promote Fluency

1. Information / Opinion Gap Tasks

For a task to be a 'gap' task there must be some communicative gap between the speakers to be filled – either an **opinion gap** (I don't know what you think about this topic so I'm going to find out) and/or an **information gap** (you have some information that I need to know). These tasks are carried out in pairs or groups and depend on one or more students either having incomplete information or no information at all, and the other(s) having the information needed to complete the task. The aim is for the 'haves' to communicate their information to the 'have nots' or the 'have nots' to extract it.

Examples:

- Picture Difference Tasks (Spot-the-difference) (*information gap*)
- Asking for / Giving directions (using a map – but each student has a slightly different version, say with some buildings named and others unnamed (*information gap*)
- Group Planning Tasks (e.g. planning a holiday using travel brochures or planning an evening out using an event guide. There should be agreement in the group on what is decided) (*opinion gap*)
- List Sequencing Tasks (also known as 'Ranking' tasks. A list of items that the group must put in order according to their opinions e.g. the 10 most important inventions of the last hundred years) (*opinion gap*)

2. Role Play

Students are given role cards that outline the situation and give some information about the role they are to adopt. Role plays give students the opportunity to practise using the language they might need for **particular situations** outside the classroom. A role play should be unscripted, although general ideas about what they are going to say might be prepared beforehand. Students should be given a little time to prepare before being asked to perform.

Examples:

- In a restaurant (**Role Card A**: You are a customer in a restaurant. You have been waiting 30 minutes for the waiter to take your order. You are hungry and in a hurry. You are a vegetarian. **Role Card B**: You are a waiter. This is your first night. The restaurant is very busy. There is only one vegetarian option on the menu but it has finished).
- In a train station
- At the doctor's
- In a job interview
- At the bank

NB: When using role play with lower levels we tend to provide much of the language as a 'framework' or 'scaffolding' within which the students can construct the dialogue. For example:

(Role play to practise asking about what you did last night, at Elementary level)
A: *What / do / last night?*
B: *Watch TV. And you?*
A: *Go / cinema*

3. Simulations

Simulations are similar to role plays but the students are not playing roles, rather they are being themselves. They are confronted by a task to do or a problem to be solved and they must do what they would do in the circumstances. Some simulations can be quite complex, with new information being fed in as the activity proceeds. The more realistic the simulation, the more likely the students will be to participate. Simulations are used a lot in business English courses.

Example:

This task could be given to Intermediate-level (B1) students, in groups:

The canteen in your school or college is losing money and will have to close soon if changes are not made. In your group make some suggestions of what could be done to keep the canteen open.

4. Board Games

It is quite easy to create board games for your class. With one blank board game template, you can create many different types of board games – ones that require accurate production of new language (i.e. every 5th square might require the students to accurately produce a present perfect sentence) or ones that give the students the opportunity to practise their fluency (i.e. every 5th square might contain 'speak for 1 minute on a topic that interests you' or 'speak for 1 minute about your last holiday' etc. There is a blank board game template in the Resources section of J. Scrivener *Learning Teaching* (Resource 6) with topic cards for board game discussions (Resource 7)

5. Puzzles & Problems

There are many published book and internet sites with logic puzzles and problems. Many of these make interesting discussion tasks, maybe following a structure of (a) letting students spend a little time individually considering the problem, then (b) bringing students together in a group to try to solve the puzzle together. Alternatively, some puzzles work well with the same stage (a), but then for stage (b) having a full class 'mingle' where all students walk around the class, and compare their solutions with others.