Unit 15   Presentation techniques and introductory activities

What are presentation techniques and introductory activities?

Presentation techniques are ways used by the teacher to **present** (introduce to learners for the first time) new language such as vocabulary, grammatical structures and pronunciation. Introductory activities are those used by a teacher to introduce a lesson or teaching topic.

Key concepts

Look at the **presentation** stages (the areas that are shaded) in these descriptions of two lessons for elementary-level secondary-school students. How are the stages different?

Presentation, Practice and Production (PPP) lesson	Task-based Learning (TBL) lesson
Aim: students learn the difference between countable and uncountable nouns, and when to use *a* and *some* with them.	Aim: students choose food and drinks for a birthday party.
Procedure:	Procedure:
1 Ask students what food and drink they like at birthday parties.	1 Hold a discussion with the students about when their birthdays are, what presents they would like, what good birthday parties they have been to and what they like to eat and drink at birthday parties.
2 Stick on the board magazine pictures of different party foods. (They should be a mixture of countable and uncountable nouns e.g. *ice cream, sandwiches, cola, fruit, bananas, chicken legs, cake, a box of sweets*.)	2 Put students into small groups and give them a worksheet with the pictures, names and prices of lots of party food and drink on it.
3 Ask students the names of the food items, write the names on the board under each picture and then do a quick choral drill on the pronunciation of these words.	3 Tell the students to do this task: choose the food and drink they would like for a birthday party for ten friends keeping within a price limit e.g. $10.
4 Say to students: 'I'm having a birthday party this weekend. I'd like a box of sweets and a cake for my party. And I'd like some ice cream, some cola and some fruit. I'd also like some sandwiches, some bananas and some chicken legs.'	4 The students do the task while the teacher goes round the class listening and answering any questions.
	5 Each group tells the other groups what decisions they have made.

Presentation, Practice and Production (PPP) lesson	Task-based Learning (TBL) lesson
5 Say 'I'd like a box of sweets', 'I'd like a cake', I'd like some ice cream', etc., and ask students to repeat each sentence chorally.	6 The students ask the teacher questions about any language they needed for the task and/or the teacher tells the students about any language she noticed they didn't know while they were doing the task, e.g. the pronunciation of some food words, the grammar of uncountable and countable nouns.
6 Point out to the students that you can count some nouns but you can't count others. These are called countable and uncountable nouns. You use *a* with singular countable nouns and *some* with uncountable nouns or plural countable nouns.	
7 Ask the students some concept questions, e.g. 'Which of the food items on the board are countable/uncountable/singular/plural?'	7 Students do a written exercise on the new language.
8 Students do a written gap-fill exercise, filling the gaps with *a* or *some*.	
9 Students work in pairs with a worksheet of pictures of food and drink items. One student tells the other what they'd like for their party, e.g. 'I'd like some/a ...', while the other student takes notes. Then they swap roles.	

The introductory stage of a lesson helps students to settle into the lesson and focus on its content. There are two kinds of introductory activities: **warmers** and **lead-ins**. Warmers are often used to raise students' energy levels or to make them feel comfortable. They are not always connected to the topic of the lesson, for example, they could be a quiz, game or pairwork activity. Lead-ins focus on the topic or new language of the lesson. They can also focus and motivate students and make a link between the topic of the lesson and the students' own lives (**personalisation**). For example, if in one lesson students are going to read a text about the Internet, rather than giving them the text immediately, we could do one or more lead-in activities such as discussing with students how often they use the Internet, what they use it for, what their favourite websites are, etc. Or if in another lesson they are going to listen to a conversation about favourite television programmes, the lead-in activities might be making a list of their favourite television programmes and discussing them with a partner. These activities will probably lead on to teaching relevant vocabulary for the texts and comprehension tasks to follow.

If you look back at the PPP and TBL lessons on page 61 you will see that they too include introductory activities. Step 1 in the PPP lesson provides a lead-in to the topic, and steps 2 and 3 a lead-in for language needed for the lesson's main aim. In the TBL lesson, steps 1 and 2 are lead-ins.

Key concepts and the language teaching classroom

The two lessons on pages 61–2 show two common and different approaches to presenting new language items. The lesson on the left is an example of a PPP lesson, the lesson on the right an example of a TBL lesson. There are many differences between them.

In the **Presentation, Practice and Production (PPP)** lesson:

- The lesson has a language aim.
- The teacher first **contextualises** the new language, i.e. puts it into a situation which shows what it means. (Step 1)
- The teacher then makes sure that the students remember previously studied language needed to practise the new language by **eliciting** it, i.e. asking students to say the language rather than giving it to them, and by doing **a choral drill** (getting the students to repeat as a whole class what he/she says). (Steps 2–3)
- The teacher next presents the new language and the students just listen. (Step 4)
- The students then say sentences including the new language in a very **controlled** or **restricted practice** activity, i.e. one in which they can use only the new language and without making mistakes. (Step 5)
- The teacher tells students about the grammatical use of the new language. (Step 6)
- The teacher asks the students **concept questions**, i.e. questions that check their understanding of the use of the new language. (Step 7)
- The students then carry out another controlled practice activity. (Step 8)
- The students do **less controlled** or **freer practice** (i.e. where they can use their own ideas) using the new language. (Step 9)

You can see that in a PPP lesson the teacher:

1 presents new language in a **context**
2 gets students to practise it in controlled practice activities
3 asks the students to use the new language in less controlled activities, in a communicative way.

In the **Task-based Learning (TBL)** lesson:

- The aim of the lesson is for the students to complete a **task** (an activity in which students try to achieve something real, and have to communicate to do so).
- The teacher starts by holding a discussion on the topic of the lesson. (Step 1)
- The teacher then gives the students tasks to do. (Steps 2, 3, 4, 5)
- Then the teacher and students discuss any new or problematic language they needed for the task. (Step 6)
- Lastly, the students do an exercise on the new language. (Step 7)

You can see that in a TBL lesson the teacher:

1 gives students tasks to do
2 presents new language after students have needed to use it, and only presents language that he/she or the students have identified as needed.

A PPP approach to presenting new language gives students an opportunity to practise language in a safe learning environment where it is difficult to make mistakes. It can therefore be quite a confidence-building approach for students. But it makes students learn language items they may not be interested in or ready to learn and gives them few opportunities to really use the language for communication. The TBL approach, on the other hand, allows students to find new language when they want to, and to use language experimentally and creatively for real communication. In this way it puts second language learners in a situation which is quite similar to the one in which

children learn their first language. Some learners may find this approach to language learning exciting and challenging. Others may wish for more guidance and structure to help them.

PPP and TBL are not the only ways of presenting new language. It is also possible, for example, to present new language to learners after they have met it in a reading or listening text which is first used for comprehension. Another possibility is to hold a discussion on a topic and introduce new language in the context of the discussion; another one is to give learners a task that requires them to use new language, then after the task, present the new language to them and then give them another task to practise the new language (**Test-teach-test**).

Presenting new language involves making various choices:

- When to present the new language? Before (as in PPP) or after (as in TBL) learners try to use the new language?
- What and how many language items to present (new grammatical structures, new vocabulary, new lexical phrases, new functional exponents, new topics)? In PPP the teacher makes this choice; in TBL the teacher and/or the learners make the choice.
- What context to present the new language in? In both TBL and PPP new language items are presented in a **meaningful** context, i.e. one that shows the meaning of the new language, and is **personalised**.
- What aids to use to help create the context, e.g. pictures, video, cassette, a worksheet?
- How to show the meaning or use of the new language, e.g. explanation, translation, presenting through a situation?
- What aspects of the new language to present, i.e. one, some or all of the following: meaning/use, pronunciation, grammar, spelling?

Introductory activities involve the teacher in selecting interesting and relevant warmers and lead-ins. The warmers make the students feel comfortable and ready for the lesson, and the lead-ins introduce the topic of the lesson and main language points needed by the learners to complete the main tasks of the lesson. You may not always need to do warmers as learners may arrive at a lesson ready to learn.

The ways you present new language or introduce lessons will depend on your learners – their level, interests, age, what language they already know, weaknesses and strengths in English and **learning styles**. They will also depend on the resources available to you in your school and the approach to presentation used in your coursebook.

See Unit 16 for types of activities and tasks, Unit 18 for selecting language for presentation and planning a lesson, Units 23–25 for resources and materials useful for presentation and Unit 26 for classroom functions often used by the teacher to present new language.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITY *(See page 173 for answers)*

Which of these are presentation activities?

1 The teacher says two new functional exponents and asks the learners to repeat them.
2 The learners read a newspaper article and do a comprehension task on it.
3 The learners ask the teacher how to say … in English and the teacher tells them.
4 The teacher points out to learners that in the task many of them mispronounced the word *station*. She asks them to repeat it after her.

5 The learners have a discussion.
6 The learners translate a short poem into their own language.
7 The teacher uses a picture story to create a context for introducing *he* and *she*.

REFLECTION

Think about these comments from teachers. Which do you agree with and why?
1 TBL is close to the way we learn new language in our first language.
2 Learners prefer a PPP to a TBL approach.
3 I always present new language in the same way as I was taught at school.