

# Formative Assessment Tasks for Assessing Receptive Skills in the Language Classroom

## ***Objectives of this booklet***

This booklet is intended to provide theoretical background on formative assessment and explore innovative ways of developing formative assessment tasks in order to assess students' receptive skills in foreign language learning,

## ***Is this booklet for you?***

**Who?** – This booklet is intended for instructors who teach general English (as a foreign or second language). Teachers working in ESP or EAP contexts would need to modify the constructs and content for their context.

**Where?** – The ideal contexts include a general English classroom in a primary, secondary, or private institutional setting. We provide ways to adapt our formative assessment tasks for students of various levels, from beginner to advanced learners.

**Why?** – Formative assessment is an effective way of assessing your students' abilities while promoting effective learning and teaching. This booklet includes 6 complete tasks with an appendix of materials to get you started!



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## 1 What is Formative Assessment?

### a Definitions of Types of Assessment

#### Formative Assessment

Any task or activity which promotes shared learning goals, effective questioning/feedback, dialogic interaction and learner autonomy<sup>1</sup>

A key premise is that for students to be able to improve, they must have the capacity to monitor the quality of their own work during actual production<sup>2</sup>

#### Summative Assessment

Any assessment activity which results in a mark that represents a student's performance at a particular time<sup>3</sup>

### b Formative vs Summative Assessment<sup>4</sup>

Formative	Summative
Informal	Formal
Continuous	Final/Snapshot
Oral/written	Written/oral
Individual	Individual/group
Scaffolding/Improving	Judging
Assessment <i>for</i> learning	Assessment <i>of</i> learning
Dialogic	Monologic
Provides feedback/suggestions	Provides a mark/status
Furthers learning	Measures learning
Intended to motivate	Often stressful for students
Flexible	Systematic, regulated
Narrow focus	Broad focus

Although formative and summative assessment have clear and sometimes opposing features, many activities fall on a 'formative-summative continuum,' so to speak. A particular task may, for example, lend itself to generating a mark for the students but the teacher also provides feedback for improvement.

### c Formative Assessment

#### Features of Formative Assessment

Formative assessment, characterized by its focus on furthering students' learning, has many key features that distinguish it from simply good teaching practices. All of these features feed into the process of students developing their learning and being critical about their goals and abilities.

Features include<sup>5</sup>:

- Teachers take the time to clarify and share learning objectives
- Teachers and students share knowledge of success criteria
- Encouraging students to be autonomous learners
- Appropriate and effective questioning during and after activities
- Feedback following the activity (oral and written)
- Effective, useful, personalized feedback
- Promoting self- and peer-evaluation

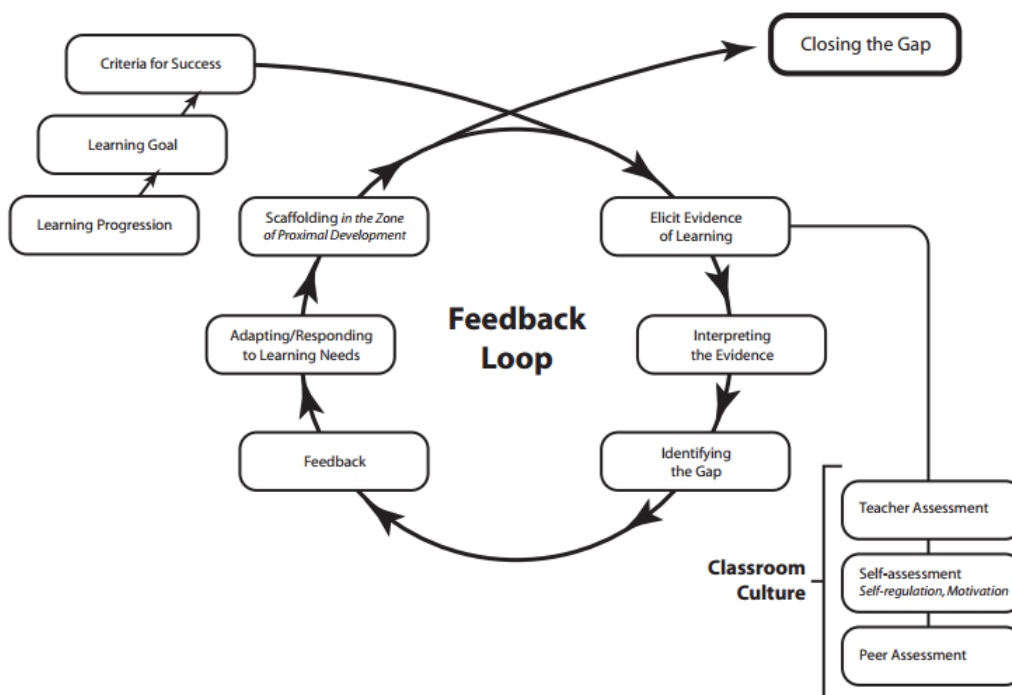
In comparison, summative assessment has different, and at times opposing, objectives. Summative assessment often focuses on external standards, high-stakes consequences, teacher-centered/

curriculum-oriented goals, tasks that determine students' current understanding, past learning (not future) and assigning marks to represent work done over a period of time in the past.

Next, let's focus on students as autonomous learners. Constructivist theories tell us that learners should be responsible for their own learning and progress. In this theory, there are 10 central factors<sup>6</sup>:

- Teachers encourage students to take initiative
- Students actively participate in creating rather than passively receiving knowledge
- Teachers challenge their students with cognitively-stimulating, open-ended, thoughtful questions
- Teachers shape interaction based on student input, they are flexible to changes in content and timing
- Teachers ask students about their understanding of a concept before sharing their own
- Teachers encourage dialogues in the classroom
- Teachers encourage students to think critically about new and old information
- Teachers seek elaboration of student responses
- Teachers give students time to formulate responses to their questions and create connections
- Teachers allow students to follow their natural curiosities by providing time and guidance

Look at the model below that shows key attributes of formative assessment<sup>7</sup>. This model emphasizes the importance of formative assessment as a cyclical or iterative practice. 'Closing the Gap' is depicted as the end goal of formative assessment, meaning the gap between what the students know and the target level of achievement; these should be as minimal as possible.



### Why Do Formative Assessment-Style Activities?

If we don't know where our students are, how can we help them go forward? Consider the following explanation of why teachers use formative assessment:

- "...to help students understand the level of learning they have achieved and clarify expectations and standards."<sup>8</sup>

- “Contribute to student learning through the provision of information about performance.”<sup>9</sup>
- “...provide feedback to shape and develop the teaching and learning activities in which both teachers and students are engaged. This becomes ‘formative assessment’ when the evidence is actually used to adapt the teaching to meet the needs of students or by students themselves to change the way they work at their own learning.”<sup>10</sup>
- Such activities which involve students give them ownership of the process<sup>11</sup>

## d Formative Assessment in Action

Now that we have a theoretical understanding of what formative assessment is, let’s consider how it can be used as an instrument in our teaching.

- Promote a learning orientation in our students, rather than a performance orientation<sup>12</sup>
- Be aware of the different learning objectives in your curriculum (closed skills, open skills, knowledge and concepts)<sup>13</sup>
- Model through peer evaluation, provide students with success criteria, use talking partners and ask questions that challenge students<sup>14</sup>
- Consider the roles of the teacher and students in formative assessment<sup>15</sup>:
  - Students should be given space to explore self- and peer-evaluation, to participate in ‘talking partners’ time, to think about and articulate opinions, to make decisions and choices and to feel confident questioning, challenging and seeking help
  - Teachers should plan lessons which promote learning, share learning goals with students, negotiate success criteria, plan questions which further learning, use strategies which maximize student learning and model ideas with accessible examples
- Make formative assessment practices continuous and interactive<sup>16</sup>

Consider the following list of suggestions for what types of formative assessment activities can be used in the classroom<sup>17</sup>:

- |                         |                               |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
| • Practical exercises   | • Student demonstrations      |
| • Tutorials             | • Portfolios                  |
| • Drafts of assessments | • Reflective log books        |
| • Group work            | • Diagnostic interviews/tests |

As previously defined, the main purpose of formative assessment is to promote learning in the classroom. In order for formative assessment to be successful, it should include the following considerations. Formative assessment<sup>18</sup>...

- is embedded in a view of teaching and learning of which it is an essential part
- involves sharing learning points with pupils
- aims to help pupils learn to know and recognize the standards they are aiming for
- involves pupils in self-assessment
- provides feedback which leads to pupils recognizing their next steps and how to take them
- is underpinned by the confidence that every student can improve
- involves both teacher and pupils reviewing and reflecting on assessment data

### Feedback in Formative Assessment

An important aspect of formative assessment is the feedback we as teachers provide to students. This can change the impact of our lessons and tasks. Here are some suggestions for conceptualizing and crafting effective feedback:

- “...any teacher’s assessment which diagnoses students’ difficulties and provides constructive feedback leads to significant learning gains.”<sup>19</sup>

- “...‘learning is a process of continuously modifying knowledge and skills’ and that feedback is essential to ‘guide, test challenge or redirect the learner’s thinking’.”<sup>20</sup>
- “...any information, process or activity which affords or accelerates learning, whether enabling students to achieve higher quality learning outcomes than they might otherwise have attained, or by enabling them to attain these outcomes more rapidly.”<sup>21</sup>
- can be provided by instructors, self or peers<sup>22</sup>
- feedback that is specific and includes opportunity for follow-up

Here are some basic principles of formative feedback<sup>23</sup>:

- Goals (learning objectives) need to be clear to students
- Feedback should measure (give guidance to) the student’s current learning state
- Formative feedback should be used as a means for closing the gap between the student’s learning state and the learning goals
- Formative feedback needs to be high quality and effective in its advice
- Students must use this feedback to improve later performance
- Feedback should be useable, accessible, appropriate and given in a timely manner<sup>24</sup>
- Feedback is cyclical nature and ongoing process, qualitative rather than quantitative, learner-centered and development-oriented<sup>25</sup>
- Feedback should push students to ask: “Where am I going?” “How am I going?” and “What’s next?”<sup>26</sup>

Aims of formative assessment<sup>27</sup>:

- Feedback and information about the learners’ level and learning progress
- Diagnosis of strengths and weaknesses
- Exploring learners’ potential
- Feedback on teaching effectiveness, for planning and modifying next steps
- Reflection by all participants
- Motivation and improvement/development
- Autonomy and learner participation

Lastly, we offer some suggestions for the format of formative assessment feedback<sup>28</sup>:

- |                     |                  |
|---------------------|------------------|
| • Annotated scripts | • Demonstrations |
| • Feedback sheets   | • Peer feedback  |
| • Marking grids     | • Tutorials      |
| • Model answers     | • Journals       |
| • Statement banks   | • Observations   |

### Moving Forward

Next, we’ll provide some practical applications of formative assessment in the classroom! The remainder of this booklet will explore designing formative assessment tasks in three different ways. We will give one example task of each task type for each receptive skill. The three methods include:

- Adapting textbook exercises to be used as formative assessment tasks
- Using other resources (e.g., websites, print materials, audio materials) to design formative assessment tasks
- Using innovative classroom activities for formative assessment purposes

### What Do We Mean by 'Ability to Read'?

The first thing we have to do before designing formative assessment tasks for our students is define what our tasks aim to address. We should ask, "What reading skills do our tasks elicit?" In other words, we need to know what constitutes reading skills and sub-skills. Based on the literature, we present the summary of reading sub-skills<sup>29</sup>:

- Skimming to understand the gist
- Scanning to locate specific information
- Reading for main ideas and supporting details
- Understanding meaning of words
- Deducing meaning of unfamiliar words from the context
- Understanding explicitly stated information
- Understanding information when not specifically stated
- Drawing inferences
- Recognizing the communicative purpose of a passage
- Recognizing a writer's purpose, attitude and tone
- Recognizing the organization of information in a passage
- Distinguishing important information from minor details

The list above may seem to provide a neat, clear basis for formative assessment task development; in other words, we seem to just need to refer to the list and select which sub-skills we want our tasks to address. However, you may notice that some sub-skills overlap and in fact, cannot be isolated from one another. Thus, it is important to be aware that our assessment tasks may actually address more than one sub-skill at the same time. The list above highlights that reading skills are comprised of a variety of aspects, some of which may overlap, and that we can later base our formative assessment reading tasks on those reading skills.

As formative assessment is aimed to support learning processes, this has to be aligned with your curriculum. Thus, it is important to make sure that the sub-skills you select are in line with the reading constructs and goals in your syllabus.

### Other Aspects of Reading

In addition to the reading sub-skills listed above, we also need to consider other aspects which affect reading process in order to define the reading constructs. In general, these aspects include reader and text variables as follows<sup>30</sup>:

- Reader's background knowledge (i.e., topic, cultural, language)
- Reader's L1 reading ability
- Reading rate/fluency
- Reader's purpose for reading
- Reader's motivation and other affective factors
- The topic of text
- The difficulty level of text/cognitive demands made on the reader
- The non-linguistic features of text (e.g., pictures, graphs, diagrams, etc.)
- The length of text
- Text type

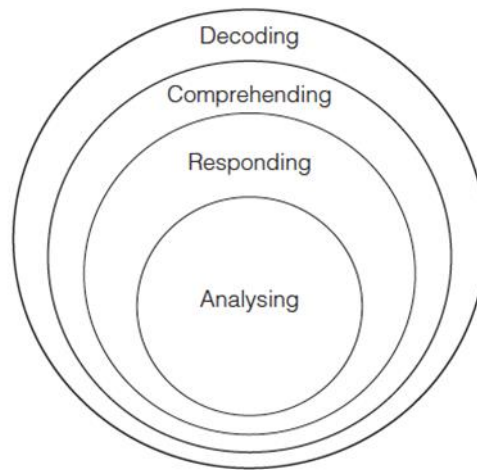
It is important to note that not all those aspects above are relevant to task design in formative assessment. However, it is good to be aware of the presence of those aspects. As an illustration, we may want to consider our students' background knowledge so that they will have higher motivation



to read. We should see the influence of background knowledge on facilitating the reading process rather than hindering it. As for the students' L1 reading ability, most studies agree that there is a certain threshold before L1 reading skills can be transferred to L2 reading<sup>31</sup>. However, this threshold may vary according to the level of difficulty of the reading. Thus, we may not be too concerned with this aspect.

### The Reading Process

Before designing our tasks, it is important to be aware of how the process of reading actually takes place. According to the model<sup>32</sup> below, there are four main stages involved in the reading process:



The 'decoding' stage occurs when written words are decoded into their spoken forms. This stage involves areas such as, 'phonological awareness, visual memory and the use of analogy.' The next stage, 'comprehending,' involves attaching meaning to the words recognized in the previous stage. The 'responding' stage involves higher cognitive processing as one actively engages with meaning in the text. In the last stage, 'analysis,' one distances himself/herself from the text and considers other aspects such as communicative purpose of text and the authorial style.

All of these stages are unobservable and hence, do not allow direct testing of reading comprehension skills. Thus, assessing reading comprehension is always done indirectly, by requiring learners to perform another skill, such as writing or speaking. Therefore, what we can assess is actually the product of reading which can be observed through learners' productive skills in response to a reading task.

### Formative Assessment of Reading

Even though reading skills are taught and practiced in most class sessions, they are generally assessed through summative tests such as end-of-term tests in order to measure students' achievement against the curriculum target. As we have seen from the review of formative versus summative assessment in Section 1, summative assessment is mostly final and hence will not benefit students and teachers significantly in terms of adjusting their learning and teaching. As a result, we encourage the practice of formative assessment to fill the gap, as a type of assessment which will bring about more benefits to both students and teachers, rather than just grades.

It is important to note that we need to align our formative assessment tasks with our syllabus, so checking the reading sub-skills covered in your syllabus is a step you should not miss. As formative assessment usually has a narrow focus, you may need to set your priorities as to which sub-skills you want to focus on in the assessment for that lesson/exercise. In addition to a narrow focus, we also need to ensure that this formative assessment task is done repeatedly so that we and our students

can monitor progress. This also means that we need a scheme to record their practice. What we mean by recording here does not simply mean grade records; in fact, we do not encourage assigning marks to our students in formative assessment. The records may contain charts, self-/peer-assessment checklist, students' answers, and so on, depending on the tasks.

## **b** Adapting a Textbook Exercise

### **i** Task Title and Example

Reading Magazine Articles

Task materials (in Appendix 1a-e):

- Reading Log
- Reading Guide
- Reading Self-Assessment Form
- Reading Worksheet
- Reading Text

### **ii** Procedures/Administration

Warm up

- The teacher shows the image of Heidemarie Schwermer on the screen (or asks students to cover the text and only look at the image) and ask students in pairs to guess who she is and what she does
- 2 students read the title of the article to check their guesses

Preparation for the task

- Students in pairs do the matching activity for the phrasal verbs in the text; the teacher can encourage them to look at the text to help them find the correct match
- After doing the matching task, students check their answers against the answer key written on the board
- Students individually read the article and answer the questions in part C
- While students are doing the task, the teacher writes down questions 1-8 on the board (or projects the typed version on the screen)
- Students first check answers with their partner and later with the answer key written on the board/projected on the screen
- Once students finished checking the answers, students fill Part A of the Self-Assessment Form
- The teacher then elicits from students the strategies they used while answering the questions; she/he can use the questions that she/he has previously written on the board to refer to reading strategies such as finding the key words in question stem or reading the Wh-question carefully (the teacher can use a marker to underline key words or Wh-questions)
- After sharing their reading strategies with their peers, students fill Part B of the Self-Assessment Form and write about the new reading strategies they learnt from their peer and teacher in the comment part

Homework

- Students fill the Reading Log for this task and four other tasks they are assigned to do focusing on the same reading sub-skill (Note: Students should keep a record of all assessment tools in their portfolio)

### **iii** Adapting for Your Context

**Level**

Since the text used in this section was taken from a course book written for intermediate students, you may want to choose a text suitable for students' level (especially for lower level students), however, you can make some adaptations to make it suitable for other levels.

For beginner students:

- Students need to be walked through the text to make sure unknown vocabulary items are not blocking their comprehension (therefore, you may need to pre-teach some key words or design matching activities similar to the one used in this sample)

For advanced students:

- You can skip the word matching part, especially for upper and advanced students, or change the focus of the task (e.g., focus on skimming or inference skills)
- You can also time the task to make it suit this group's level

### **Task selection**

- Choose tasks which are suitable for assessing the focused sub-skill (e.g., if you are trying to focus on reading for gist, make sure the text you choose to use for assessment contains enough factual and detailed information)
- Check if the questions for the task are suitable for measurement purposes
- If questions in the task are not suitable for assessing the focused sub-skill, you may need to design your own questions for the text you have selected from your course book

### **General points**

- Select certain reading sub-skills you want to focus on each time based on your students' needs and level
- Adapt the items in the self-assessment form and the reading log according to your focus
- Adapt the language of the self-assessment sheet and the reading log according to your students' level of language proficiency
- Students need to be aware of the purpose of the test and how it will help them in their learning
- Students need to be trained how to use formative assessment checklists and reflection forms and how to keep a record of them in their portfolio
- Remember that formative assessment is a process and therefore it needs to be done on a regular basis
- You need to decide on the frequency of these assessment tasks according to time allocated in your program (you can always do one task of a set of tasks in class and assign the rest as homework)
- Students should keep a record of their assessment tasks in their portfolios which you can use later for feedback and tutorial sessions

### **iv How to Assess/Give Feedback**

Students fill the Reading Log for each of the four reading tasks they do during a week. Depending on the nature of the course, they can either fill the form for the tasks they do in class or do some as homework. Students also use the Self-Assessment Form for assessing and monitoring their reading performance and strategies. The teacher can then give feedback to students according to their Reading Log and Self-Assessment Form, either in a feedback session for the whole class or in individualized tutorials for individuals or small groups. The teacher can also adjust further teaching practices and select the focus for the next set of formative assessment tasks.

### **v Skills/Rationale**

Skills:

- Scanning to locate specific information
- Understanding explicitly stated information

Rationale:

Using tasks and activities from the course book you are using in your program is one of the most convenient ways of designing tasks for formative assessment purposes. First, this is because most

activities are already accessible to both teachers and students, which saves a lot of extra copying and printing. In addition, it can save time since you do not have to set aside some extra time for assessment and are in fact adapting a teaching activity for assessment purposes. That is why using classroom resources such as course books could be an economical and practical way of designing tasks for formative assessment.

## **c** Using Resources

### **i** Task Title and Example

Reading News Articles

Task materials (in Appendix 2a-d):

- News article
- Reading Rate Chart
- Self-Assessment Checklist
- Teacher Feedback Sheet

### **ii** Procedures/Administration

As this reading formative assessment task should be done continuously, we recommend each student have his/her own logbook or folder where they will keep the Reading Rate Chart, the Self-Assessment Checklist and Teacher Feedback Sheet. This will also allow recording of the formative assessment and allow teachers to check students' progress and reflection on which they will base their personalized feedback.

The procedures of this task involve three phases as outlined below.

Phase 1:

- Put learners into pairs, in each pair there will be a student A and a student B
- Distribute a news article to one student in each pair (student A) and tell them to start reading when instructed
- Tell student B to time and record student A's reading duration
- Tell student A to skim the article and once finished
- Student A will describe the article to their partner

Phase 2:

- Based on the gist of the article, student B prepares some questions about details of the article
- Student A reads the news article again, this time they have to pay closer attention to details as student B will ask them questions
- Student B asks student A the questions, when answering the questions, student A may consult the article if necessary

Phase 3:

- Student A fills out the Self-Assessment Checklist and keeps it in a logbook

If time allows, you can reverse the roles so that student B could have the chance to read, of course, a different news article. Otherwise, you can do this in the following class session.

### **iii** Adapting for Your Context

This sample task is to be used with students with intermediate English proficiency, but it can surely be adapted to suit the context of your class. We provide the suggestions below to help you adapt the task to your context.

For beginner students:

- Use news articles with low linguistic complexity, or simplify the news articles yourself as authentic texts are not graded, finding news articles with simple language can be very difficult
- Consider not requiring students to time their reading, or modify the time axis on the Reading Rate Chart, allowing longer time to finish reading
- Try to simplify the statements in the Self-Assessment Checklist, or use L1 in the Self-Assessment Checklist because language complexity should not cause hindrance for them to reflect on their practice

For advanced students:

- Use more challenging or even longer news articles
- Add tasks which require them to discuss beyond the text in order to stimulate their critical thinking skills
- Modify the Self-Assessment Checklist and require them to, for example, comment on the communicative purpose of the text or the authorial style and attitude (this means you are expanding the reading constructs beyond basic reading sub-skills)

#### **iv How to Assess/Give Feedback**

The assessment involved in this task is mainly self-assessment where students assess and reflect on their own practice. In addition to that, you can give them feedback after several reading occasions based on the information in their logbook (the Reading Rate Chart and the Self-Assessment Checklist) and write the feedback on the Teacher Feedback Sheet. Besides using the information to give feedback to students, you can also use it to adjust your teaching of reading and the formative assessment task itself. For instance, when you notice that many students appear to have difficulty with reading the news article, perhaps you can find simpler articles for future tasks or simplify the articles.

#### **v Skills/Rationale**

Skills:

- Skimming to understand gist
- Scanning to locate specific information
- Reading for main ideas and supporting details
- Understanding explicitly stated information

Rationale:

By using news articles in assessment you can promote task and text authenticity. The task is considered authentic because news articles are a text type that our students will likely encounter in their life, so the skills developed will be transferable and useful. The materials used are also authentic even though you may need to simplify the texts for lower-level students. However, we can argue that at least we are presenting them with authentic issues discussed in the articles. Another advantage of using news articles is that this allows us to assess a wide variety of commonly learned reading sub-skills, such as those listed above. However, we must be careful in choosing what articles to use, especially with regards to the topics of the articles. We surely do not want to use articles with distressing and sensitive issues.

Especially with the sample task presented above, you need to ensure you have enough articles which are relatively similar in length and level of difficulty. This is important because we have to do this task repeatedly and want to be able to monitor students' progress. We have listed a number of news websites on the last page of this booklet, where you can get materials for your students.

## **d Using Activities**

### **i Task Title and Example**

If, then!—Environment Task

Task materials (in Appendix 3a-b):

- Environment Activity Information
- Checklist for Environment Task

### **ii Procedures/Administration**

This task follows an activity which teaches students the necessary environment-related vocabulary for the task (listed in Environment Activity Information). Teachers should feel comfortable adding more words and sentences to the Environment Activity Information sheet. This task is best done in a space where students can move around.

- Hand each student a slip of paper
- Tell student that they must find their match; if for instance, if one student has a slip of paper that begins, “If...” they must find the other student whose slip completes their conditional statement, beginning with “then, ...” (the sentence must match in terms of content)
- Once students meet their partner, they should discuss the statement in pairs
- After all partners have met and discussed their sentences, they will present the statement to the class and explain what can be done to prevent this negative impact on the environment

### **iii Adapting for Your Context**

The task explained above is meant for intermediate level students. However, with simple alterations, this task can be suitable for students with higher and lower levels of proficiency.

For beginner students:

- Try pairing simple words to images and asking students to find their match
- Consider having multiple sets of slips to match, perhaps about different subjects within the same lesson (this way, each student can have a turn looking for an image to match their word and looking for the word that matches their image)
- Alternatively, pass out the images and words a second time, giving a different paper to each student

For advanced students:

- Create sentences that are more complex, perhaps with different conditionals or longer clauses
- Create sentences that will fit into a longer passage; for instance, if the topic is history or the passage is a story, divide each sentence into two pieces, once partners find each other, the class must put the story/passage in order

### **iv How to Assess/Give Feedback**

In order to assess students at the intermediate level, with the version of the task described in Section 2dii, ask the partners to discuss their sentences and present the statement to the class. They should be asked to explain what can be done to prevent this negative impact on the environment and perhaps try to explain why it happens. (For example, sentence: If lakes are polluted, then fish will die. Explanation: Fish cannot live in dirty water because they will have no food. Why: Humans put chemicals and materials into lakes and rivers instead of safely disposing of them.) Other students who are observing should ask questions about the statements. Students should be asked if this environmental issue is a problem in their country/community and what can be done to mitigate the harmful effects in the statements. During these presentations, the teacher should use a checklist to determine how many points the students address from the success criteria. Success criteria should

be determined and communicated to students before the task begins (from the Checklist for Environment Task).

In order for this type of activity to be useful and for feedback to be monitored, consider developing conditional statements about different topics or of varying complexities to challenge students. By repeating the task and using the information/cues gained from the experience of matching sentence clauses to a random partner and negotiating meaning, students will practice their reading and reasoning skills. Students may also learn to pay particular attention to personal and demonstrative pronouns (i.e., it, that, they, this) while finding their match. Hopefully, recognition of these patterns will feed into students' own production and receptive skills in the future.

**v Skills/Rationale**

Skills:

- Drawing inferences/making predictions
- Recognizing organization/structures
- Understanding explicitly stated information

Rationale:

This task is meant to elicit conversation from understanding of a sentence or passage. The task will challenge students to think beyond the sentences they are provided and question what they know and see around them in the world. Pair work and evaluation of the pairs' presentations encourage whole group involvement with teacher moderation.

### 3 Using Formative Assessment to Assess Receptive Skills: Listening

#### a Listening Construct

##### Defining the Construct

Listening is an active process in which listeners are continuously building up meaning through the application of the different types of knowledge they possess to the incoming messages received from the interlocutor. In order to measure this skill, we first need to define it in form of a construct. There are two ways of defining the listening construct. We can define listening based on a competence model or a task-based model. However, test designers use both models to define this construct. Defining a construct is highly dependent on the purpose of the test, the target language use and even the availability of the resources for designing a test<sup>33</sup>.

Listening is the ability to<sup>34</sup> ...

- process the extended samples of realistic spoken language, automatically and in real time
- understand the linguistic information that is unequivocally included in the text
- make whatever inferences are unambiguously implicated by the content of the passage

##### Listening Purpose

Below, the table shows two functions and purposes for listening<sup>35</sup>. The first function, interactional conversations, is mainly used to transfer information and therefore is more “message-oriented” rather than “interlocutor-oriented.” On the other hand, the second function, transactional conversations, emphasizes the interaction and the continuous exchange of information between interlocutors. The table below illustrates these two types of language functions in listening.

Listening Purposes<sup>36</sup>

Transactional	Interactional
Receptive listening	Collaborative listening (and speaking)
One speaker	Several speakers
Communicate information	Establish rapport
Focus on content	Focus on social interaction
Time to prepare	Real time

##### Listening Behaviors and Sub-Skills

This next table illustrates two models for listening behavior, namely global/local listening and selective/careful listening.

Listening Behaviors<sup>37</sup>

	Global Listening	Local Listening
Selective Listening	Listening for gist: listening selectively in order to identify the overall topic Search listening: listening selectively for information in the same semantic field as read in items	Listening for specific details: listening selectively in order to identify figures, dates, names, locations
Careful Listening	Understanding a stretch of input: listening carefully to understand the main ideas and (where necessary) to infer meaning	Understanding lexis: processing the immediate context to deduce meaning of unknown words

Different taxonomies of listening sub-skills have been proposed in order to describe listening process. Following is a comprehensive taxonomy of listening subs-skills<sup>38</sup>, which is designed based on



the Communicative Approach to language teaching. Although this taxonomy is not considered a complete list of listening sub-skills, it can be used as a reference when designing listening tasks.

#### Direct meaning comprehension

- Listening for gist
- Listening for main idea(s) or important information; and distinguishing that from supporting details, or examples
- Listening for specific, including recall of important details
- Determining a speaker's attitude or intention towards a listener or a topic

#### Inferred meaning comprehension

- Making inferences and deduction
- Relating utterances to their social and situational contexts
- Recognizing the communicative function of utterances
- Deducing meaning of unfamiliar lexical items from context

#### Contributory meaning comprehension

- Understanding phonological features
- Understanding grammatical notions such as comparisons, causes, result, degree etc.
- Understanding discourse markers
- Understanding the main syntactic structures of clauses or idea units
- Understanding cohesion, especially references
- Understanding lexical cohesion, especially references
- Understanding lexis

#### Listening and taking notes

- Ability to extract salient points to summarize the text
- Ability to select relevant key points

The following are three behaviors for assessing different aspects of the listening construct. These three behaviors include a list of tasks to elicit them<sup>39</sup>:

#### Knowledge of the sound system

- Minimal pairs with decontextualized words
- Minimal pairs with words in an utterance
- Recognizing grammatical structures
- Recognizing intonation patterns
- Recognizing stress

#### Comprehension of the literal meaning

- Body movement tasks
- Retention tasks
- Picture tasks
- Conversation tasks
- Self-evident comprehension task

#### Comprehension beyond local and literal meaning

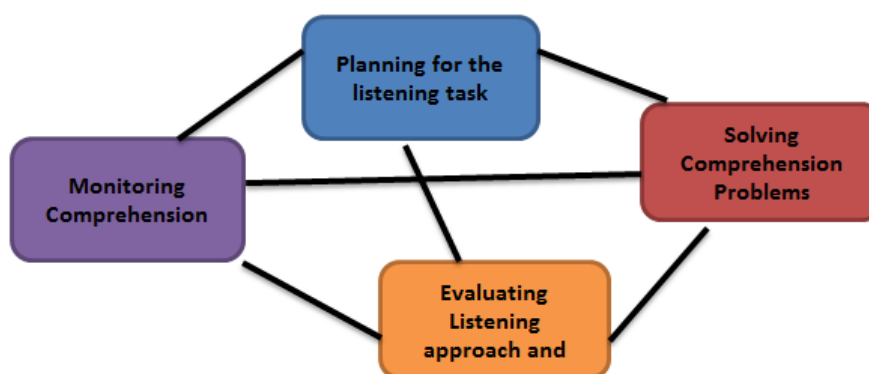
- Understanding gist
- General passage comprehension
- Information transfer task

### **Formative Assessment of Listening**

#### Metacognition and formative assessment

- Metacognition can best be enhanced with formative assessment (low-stakes activities that provide teachers with feedback on level of student understanding)<sup>40</sup>
- Learners experience greater success in listening comprehension and weaker learners benefit most<sup>41</sup>

This figure shows the metacognitive listening processes and their interactions<sup>42</sup>:



Guidelines for formative assessment of listening:

- It is important to decide which listening sub-skills are to be assessed and how detailed the focus needs to be
- Students can use a pre-defined checklist (designed by either the teacher or students) to evaluate their listening performance
- Using the same task type to assess how students are improving over time
- Asking students to evaluate their level of comprehension in a listening log and track their progress over time
- Students can make up their own questions about important aspects of the text, based on their own priorities in small groups or as a class
- Students can keep a learning diary or progress sheet to track their learning and progress in listening
- Using peer-assessment to become each other's learning resources
- It is useful to design a worksheet that can be used with any listening text

There are different forms of evaluation instruments which we can use to assess students for formative purposes. While observation instruments are mainly used for the assessment of productive skills (writing and speaking), measurement instruments (e.g., true/false, fill in the blanks, chart completion, short answers, etc.) are used for receptive skills. This is mainly due to the fact that learning processes involved in listening and reading are difficult to observe directly.

Sample tools for formative assessment of listening:

- Listening logs
- Self-assessment and reflection forms
- Teacher observation checklists (for interactive listening/speaking tasks)
- Data collection forms (for teachers)
- Students' goal sheets

## **b** Adapting a Textbook Exercise

### **i** Task Title and Example

Listening to Recorded Speech/Monologue

Task materials (in Appendix 4a-d):

- Listening Log
- Listening Guide
- Listening Self-Assessment Form
- Listening Script of Monologue

## **ii Procedures/Administration**

This example is adapted from Landmark-Advanced (2009) to be a formative evaluation task for listening skills.

- Students fill in Part A of the Self-Assessment Form; they will do the same for all four listening tasks they do for formative assessment purposes (both in class and at home)
- Students in pairs do the lead-in part (this can help students with brainstorming about the topic and making predictions)
- Students do Part 3 individually (they are first given 30 seconds to read the questions)
- The teacher projects answers on the screen or writes them on the board and students check their answers
- Students then do Part B of the Self-Assessment Form
- The teacher asks students to reflect on their performance and jot down reasons for not getting a question correct
- The teacher then invites students to share their reflection with the class; while students share their ideas, the teacher can take notes for future practice or individual feedback
- The teacher then invites students to come up with solutions and strategies for how to tackle these learning difficulties and takes note of them on the board
- Using the feedback from peers and the teacher, students do Part C of the Self-Assessment Form
- Students fill in the Listening Log for this task

## **iii Adapting for Your Context**

### **Level**

Since the listening text used in this section was taken from a course book written for advanced learners, you may want to choose a text suitable for your students' level, however, the other parts of the task are suitable for all levels.

For beginner students:

- Students need to be walked through the listening text to make sure unknown vocabulary items are not blocking their comprehension

### **Task selection**

- Choose tasks which are suitable for assessing the targeted sub-skill (e.g., if you are trying to focus on listening for details, make sure the text you choose contains enough factual and detailed information)
- Check if the questions for the task are suitable for measurement purposes
- If questions in the task are not suitable for assessing the targeted sub-skill, you may need to design your own questions for the text you have selected from your course book

### **General points**

- Select certain listening sub-skills you want to focus on each time, based on your students' needs and level
- Adapt the items in the Self-Assessment Form and the Listening Log according to your focus
- Adjust the language of the Self-Assessment Form and the Listening Log according to your students' level of language proficiency
- Students need to be aware of the purpose of the test and how it will help them in their learning
- Students need to be trained on how to use the Formative Assessment Checklist or other reflection-type forms in order to keep a record

- Remember formative assessment is a process and therefore needs to be done on a regular basis
- You need to decide on the frequency of these assessment tasks according to time allocated in your program (you can always do one task of a set of tasks in class and assign the rest as homework)
- Students should keep a record of their assessment tasks in their portfolios, which can later be used for feedback and tutorial sessions

#### **iv How to Assess/Give Feedback**

Students fill in the Listening Log for all four listening tasks they do during a week. Depending on the nature of the course, they can either fill in the form for the tasks they do in class or do some as homework. After filling in each Listening Log with a focus on a certain aspect of listening sub-skills, students can share their progress with other peers and try to share strategies that could help them improve their listening comprehension. In addition, students can have occasional tutorials with the teacher after filling in a set of Listening Logs and share their reflections on their progress. Teachers can also provide students with some feedback on their progress and what they need to do to move to the next stage of their learning process.

#### **v Skills/Rationale**

Skills:

- Listening for specific information, including recall of important details
- Following the natural flow of speech
- Listening attentively and listening for key words

Rationale:

One major issue related to inserting assessment in everyday classroom practice is time. Therefore, it is a good idea to use peer-checking and pair work when we are conducting assessment tasks. Students can simply check the answers in pairs or groups, which both promotes cooperative learning and learner autonomy and also saves a considerable amount of time. Another way to deal with this issue is to assign a part or parts of the Listening Log as homework. Once students know how to use Listening Logs, they can always do other tasks which are either selected from their student book or exercise book, and fill out the log accordingly. In conclusion, training students how to do certain tasks for formative assessment purposes and how to benefit from these activities could encourage a sense of cooperation and autonomy which would help teachers with time-management, especially in conducting assessment tasks on a regular basis.

### **c Using Resources**

#### **i Task Title and Example**

Listening to News Broadcasts

Task materials (in Appendix 5a-d):

- Script of News Broadcast
- Listening Comprehension Worksheet
- Listening Comprehension Skills Profile Chart
- Teacher Feedback Sheet

#### **ii Procedures/Administration**

As this listening formative assessment task will be done repeatedly throughout the course, each

student should have his/her own logbook or folder where they can keep the Listening Comprehension Worksheet, the Listening Comprehension Skills Profile Chart and Teacher Feedback Sheet. This will also allow recording and monitoring of the formative assessment and enable teachers to check students' progress and provide feedback on their progress.

For this task, you can follow the procedures described below:

- Distribute the Listening Comprehension Worksheet to students
- As you can see, the questions on the worksheet are divided into two groups, A and B
- Play the recording and get students to answer question 1 in group A
- Tell students to read questions in group B
- Then, play the recording again and ask them to answer the questions
- Put them in pairs and get them to discuss their answers, if their answers are different from their partners, they may add their partners' answers below their original answers and keep their answers
- Discuss the answers together
- Students fill in the Listening Comprehension Skills Profile Chart
- Explain the meaning of the codes after each question (these codes correspond to the listening sub-skills on the Listening Comprehension Skills Profile Chart)

### **iii Adapting for Your Context**

This sample task is to be used with intermediate students, but you can adapt it to suit your students' proficiency levels and needs. We provide the suggestions below to help you adapt the task to your context.

For beginner students:

- Consider whether the genre of news broadcasts is suitable for your beginner students
- Try to simplify some of the vocabulary
- Read the script at a lower speed
- Read or play the recording more than twice

For advanced students:

- Use authentic materials for news broadcasts such as from BBC News or VOA News websites
- Add questions which will address other listening sub-skills (please refer to your syllabus)

### **iv How to Assess/Give Feedback**

You can check their Listening Comprehension Skills Profile Chart to gain information about the salient features of their listening skill performance. You will then use this information to give feedback to the students and reflect on your own teaching. You do not have to write feedback for students after every practice. You can write your personal feedback on the Teacher Feedback Sheet after several occasions of practice.

In addition to your feedback, you can also train your students to make sense of the information in the Listening Comprehension Skills Profile Chart. For example, you can show them that certain questions reflect specific listening sub-skills and the Listening Comprehension Skills Profile Chart records their performance on those skills. They can have a look at the sub-skills they have done well on and those needing improvement.

### **v Skills/Rationale**

Skills:

- Listening for gist

- Listening for main ideas
- Listening for specific information
- Making inferences and deduction

**Rationale:**

Most authentic listening broadcasts are probably not suitable for students with a lower level of proficiency, as these texts are not graded. Even for this sample task, the news broadcast is made for teaching purposes even though the content is authentic (taken from <http://www.breakingnewsenglish.com/1402/140220-renewable-energy.html>). For students with higher proficiency, you can use news broadcasts from BBC News or VOA News websites. There are even videos for some news stories.

Similar to the sample task for reading news articles, you also need to ensure that you have enough news recordings with more or less the same length and degree of difficulty. As for developing the questions, you have to make sure that their questions reflect the constructs or listening sub-skills you aim to focus on. The website where we took the recording from actually provides different sets of comprehension questions. It is really tempting to just use them verbatim, but we have to be careful as they may not reflect your constructs and thus do not correspond to the Listening Comprehension Skills Profile Chart. Therefore, we recommend that you write your own questions which will suit the constructs you have defined.

**d Using Activities**

**i Task Title and Example**

Directions and Obstacles

Task materials (in Appendix 6a):

- Blindfold, obstacles in the room (not in appendix)
- Student Self-Assessment Sheet

**ii Procedures/Administration**

This activity should be used in the classroom after you have taught your students basic directions and commands, including the following vocabulary: right, left, forward, backward, turn, stop, walk/go. Explain to students that a turn is a quarter of a turn (90°), not one full rotation. This activity is best done in a large space with moveable tables/chairs.

- Ask for one volunteer to participate in the first round of this activity
- Blindfold the student
- Arrange the furniture in the room so that there are a few obstacles
- Spin the student in a circle a few times so they do not know which direction they are facing in the room
- Give the student the first command, perhaps, “Walk forward” followed by a second “Stop!” next, “Turn right”
- The ‘instruction giver,’ in this first case, the teacher, must navigate the student around the classroom obstacles
- After the ‘instruction giver’ is satisfied that the student can listen and follow directions accurately, a new student is selected
- The student who was blindfolded now gives the instructions
- When each new student is blindfolded, the obstacles in the room should be moved

The activity should continue until each student has been in both roles, the ‘instruction giver’ and the ‘instruction receiver.’ The teacher should be open to the students taking control of the activity and perhaps leading the blindfolded student outside of the classroom or involving other students, who

are observing, in the activity. In order to give the last student the opportunity to give instructions, the teacher may want to participate as a blindfolded ‘instruction receiver.’

### **iii Adapting for Your Context**

This activity is meant for basic, beginner language learners. Depending on the skills you want your students to practice, integrate different aspects into the activity that require them to utilize these skills.

For intermediate students:

- Consider giving two commands at a time
- Add more obstacles in the space

For advanced students:

- Consider giving three commands at a time
- Add more obstacles in the space
- Ask students to remember how many times they turn a certain direction (this would involve memory)
- Give students a new task, perhaps begin with asking them to come to the front of the room to a table with objects; ask them to perform actions in a certain order and check the final product (they can build a house with blocks, mix the ingredients for a cake, draw a picture, etc.)

### **iv How to Assess/Give Feedback**

While the students perform the task, the teacher should observe and make notes about the performance of each student while they are in each role. The teacher can choose to intervene (to demonstrate/model the correct movements) or allow the observing students to contribute to any miscommunications.

Following the activity, students should get into pairs and discuss the activity. They should discuss the errors they made while listening, if they bumped into any obstacles and why they think they misunderstood. Individually, students should assess which commands they had difficulty understanding, by writing down the phrases.

Next, the teacher should give the students a blank sheet of paper and ask students to draw the map that she/he dictates to the students. The teacher will collect these maps and determine their accuracy, providing students with feedback and drawing conclusions about the instructions that students did not understand.

### **v Skills/Rationale**

Skills:

- Listening for details to follow instructions

Rationale:

Initially, the focus is on trying to isolate listening as a skill, as much as possible. The first part of the task requires students to listen and to move, without involving productive skills or reading. The assessment and feedback portion of the task involves other skills in order to create a dialogic environment to discuss the activity. When done more than once and with follow-up practices, students could improve their ability to listen for detail and follow instructions.

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- <sup>1</sup> Adapted from Irons 2008 (p. 7); Clarke 2005a (p. 5); Marshall 2011 (p. 49) and Sharpling 2014b (slide 6)
  - <sup>2</sup> Adapted from Crooks 2001
  - <sup>3</sup> Adapted from Irons 2008 (p. 7) and Sharpling 2014b (slide 5)
  - <sup>4</sup> Table compiled with information from Clarke 2005a (p. 5-7); Irons 2008 (p. 7-9) and Sharpling 2014b (slide 4)
  - <sup>5</sup> Adapted from Clarke 2005b (p. 2-3)
  - <sup>6</sup> Adapted from Clarke 2005b (p. 11-14)
  - <sup>7</sup> From Heritage 2007
  - <sup>8</sup> From Irons 2008 (p.17)
  - <sup>9</sup> From Irons 2008 (p.16)
  - <sup>10</sup> From Irons 2008 (p.17)
  - <sup>11</sup> From Brooks 2002 cited in Sharpling 2014b (p. 3)
  - <sup>12</sup> From Clarke 2005b (p. 22)
  - <sup>13</sup> From Clarke 2005b (p. 26)
  - <sup>14</sup> From Clarke 2005a (p. 9)
  - <sup>15</sup> From Clarke 2005a (p. 10-11)
  - <sup>16</sup> From Sharpling 2014b (p. 2)
  - <sup>17</sup> From Irons 2008 (p. 58)
  - <sup>18</sup> From Crooks 2001
  - <sup>19</sup> From Irons 2008 (p. 21)
  - <sup>20</sup> From Irons 2008 (p. 21)
  - <sup>21</sup> From Irons 2008 (p. 21)
  - <sup>22</sup> From Irons 2008 (p. 23)
  - <sup>23</sup> From Irons 2008 (p. 22)
  - <sup>24</sup> From Irons 2008 (p. 62)
  - <sup>25</sup> From Harsch 2014b (p. 6)
  - <sup>26</sup> From Hattie and Timperley 2007 (p. 86)
  - <sup>27</sup> From Freeman and Lewis 1998 cited in Harsch 2014b (slide 7)
  - <sup>28</sup> From Irons 2008 (p. 59) and Harsch 2014b (slide 10)
  - <sup>29</sup> Adapted from Davis 1968 and Munby 1978 presented in Alderson 2000 (p. 9-11)
  - <sup>30</sup> Adapted from Alderson 2000
  - <sup>31</sup> Sainsbury 2006
  - <sup>32</sup> Sainsbury 2006 (p. 17)
  - <sup>33</sup> Buck 2001 (p. 113)
  - <sup>34</sup> Buck 2001 (p. 114)
  - <sup>35</sup> Brown and Yule 1983 cited in Harsch 2014a
  - <sup>36</sup> Brown and Yule 1983 and Buck 2001 cited in Harsch 2014a
  - <sup>37</sup> Buck 2001 cited in Harsch 2014a
  - <sup>38</sup> Weir 1993 cited in Buck 2001 (p. 54-55)
  - <sup>39</sup> Buck 2001 cited in Harsch 2014a
  - <sup>40</sup> Lang 2012 cited in Vandergrift and Goh 2012
  - <sup>41</sup> Vandergrift and Tafaghodtari 2010 cited in Vandergrift and Goh 2012
  - <sup>42</sup> From Vandergrift and Goh 2012 (p. 241)



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For further reading:

- <https://www.sedl.org/reading/framework/elements.html>
- [http://www.caslt.org/resources/english-sl/classroom-resource-form-assess-toc-esl\\_en.php](http://www.caslt.org/resources/english-sl/classroom-resource-form-assess-toc-esl_en.php)
- <http://www.derby.ac.uk/lei/learning-and-teaching/formative-assessment>
- <http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/article/what-are-formative-assessments-and-why-should-we-use-them>

Resource suggestions for creating materials:

- [www.voanews.com](http://www.voanews.com)
- [www.bbc.co.uk/news/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/)
- [www.breakingnewsenglish.com](http://www.breakingnewsenglish.com)