

# TAKING IT TO TASK

*The newsletter of the JALT task-based language teaching SIG. Volume 3 Issue 1–November 2018*

## CONTENTS

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Pg. 2. **Editorial / Announcement**

Pg. 3. **Article:** An Evidence-Based Approach to L2 Task Design by Shoko Sasayama (University of Tokyo)

Pg. 16. **Lesson Plan:** *A Market Research Survey Project* by Nicholas Marx (Kanazawa Seiryō University)

Pg. 23. **Lesson Plan:** *Storytelling: Tapping Student Imagination* by Simon Rowe (Kwansei Gakuin University)

## SIG INFORMATION

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For publications and conference queries, contact us at <tbltinasia@gmail.com>. For everything else, contact us at <tbl@jalt.org>.

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## EDITORIAL

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Welcome to our first issue of the third volume of *Taking it to Task*! In 2016, we decided to change our regular publication to a digital newsletter format with the hopes of being able to accept a greater variety of submissions. This issue is also being printed as a special edition for the JALT 2018 national conference. Beyond full-length articles and practical lesson plans, we also encourage the submission of opinion/think pieces, book reviews, and any TBLT-related news. In this issue, we are pleased to include an article from Shoko Sasayama (University of Tokyo) and lesson plans from Nicholas Marx (Kanazawa Seiryō University) and Simon Rowe (Kwansei Gakuin University).

In the article, Shoko Sasayama begins by outlining three principles of effective task design that have been gleaned from the accumulated research in this area and follows through a detailed example of the implementation of these principles in an English course taught by the author.

In the first lesson plan, Nicholas Marx outlines a multi-lesson survey project that tasks groups of learners with developing their own market research surveys and collecting data from one another as well as other students on campus. The project culminates with slideshow presentations in which the results are shared and discussed with accompanying charts and graphs. In the second lesson plan, Simon Rowe introduces a series of adaptable writing tasks to encourage students to draw on their personal experiences, imagination, and creativity as they try their hand at storytelling in English. Building on students' knowledge of popular folktales and movies and expanding their knowledge of common plot types and themes, this lesson plan is sure to bring a spark to any writing workshop or intensive writing program.

We hope that you enjoy reading this issue, and if you have a TBLT-related article, lesson plan, book review, or opinion/think piece that you would like to submit for consideration in a future issue of *Taking it to Task*, please contact us at <tbltinasia@gmail.com>.

Kurtis McDonald, Publications Chair

## ANNOUNCEMENT

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### **The 8<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Task-Based Language Teaching**

The 8<sup>th</sup> International Conference on TBLT will be held at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada from August 19-21, 2019. This international conference on TBLT takes place biennially (on opposite years to the TBL SIG "TBLT in Asia" conference). Past conferences have always been intellectually stimulating with plenaries by prominent scholars in the field, and presentations and hands-on workshops on various cutting-edge research and practices. It targets not only researchers, but also practitioners. The theme of the conference is "TBLT: Insight, Instruction, Outcomes." For more information, please check their website at <<http://www.iatblt.org/conferences>>. A call for papers is open until December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2018.

## An Evidence-Based Approach to L2 Task Design

*Shoko Sasayama – University of Tokyo*

### INTRODUCTION

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Task design is an integral part of second language (L2) pedagogical practice, and thus, in L2 research much attention has been devoted to this very topic. The majority of research on L2 task design has been conducted from cognitive perspectives. Indeed, in their meta-analysis, Sasayama, Norris, and Malicka (2018) found 240 experimental studies that investigated the role of L2 task design in relation with cognition (in addition to many other non-experimental publications on this topic). In this domain of research, therefore, enough empirical evidence exists to take an evidence-based approach to L2 task design and improve the effectiveness of the tasks that are of interest for language teaching and learning. The purpose of this paper is to summarize a few principles of effective task design based on the accumulated research evidence and to consider how these principles can be applied to the actual designing of L2 pedagogic tasks.

### PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE TASK DESIGN

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In the domain of L2 task design, researchers have particularly been interested in the notion of “cognitive complexity” or “cognitive load” of a task, defined as total amount and types of mental effort required for performing a task (Sweller, 1988). They have generally focused on how cognitive load might influence L2 learners’ language production, interaction, and potentially acquisition. Research thus far has revealed the following three principles of task design in relation to cognitive load.

#### ***Principle 1: An L2 task’s cognitive load can be manipulated by changing inherent design characteristics, implementation conditions, and language demands***

According to Robinson (2001, 2011) and Skehan (1998, 2014), cognitive load of a task can be manipulated by: (a) inherent task design characteristics, such as the number of elements involved in a task and the degree of reasoning demands; (b) implementation conditions, like planning time, task repetition, and the availability of support; and (c) linguistic demands, including grammatical complexity, vocabulary difficulty/frequency, and sentence or text length. A task of ordering food, for example, becomes more attention-consuming when L2 learners are presented with more options to choose from, if they are asked to order for a date and impress him/her with a limited budget, if they are pressed for time (i.e., with no time to plan) because people are lining up behind them, or if the menu involves lots of unknown words (like in a French restaurant, perhaps...!).

How about the effects of manipulating cognitive load on L2 learners’ task performances? Do we then know anything about them? According to Malicka and Sasayama (2017), reporting on their meta-

analysis study, simple and complex tasks were revealed to have distinct effects on L2 learners' language production in terms of syntactic complexity, grammatical accuracy, lexical variety, and fluency. Availability of planning time prior to or during the task (i.e., a simpler version of a task) was shown to improve syntactic complexity and accuracy considerably. Repeating the same task or the same task genre (i.e., a simple task on the repeated occasion) was shown to have a positive effect on syntactic complexity, grammatical accuracy, and fluency. When support was available (in the forms of a predetermined storyline for a narrative task or a transcript for a listening task, for instance; i.e., simple tasks), it was revealed that the task elicited improved lexical variety and fluency<sup>1</sup>. Complex tasks, on the other hand, also had a role to play. In particular, complex tasks with increased number of elements were observed to lead to improved lexical variety; and complex tasks which required learners to tell a story based on a remembered picture set (as opposed to a picture set available in front of them) were shown to improve syntactic complexity. Table 1 below summarizes these general trends.

Table 1  
*Summary of General Trends of Five Representative Cognitive Load Design Variables in Terms of Syntactic Complexity, Grammatical Accuracy, Lexical Variety, and Fluency*

Cognitive load design variable	Syntactic complexity	Grammatical accuracy	Lexical variety	Fluency
+ Planning time (Simple task)	++	++	-	-
+ Repetition (Simple task)	+	+	-	+
+ Support (Simple task)	N/A	N/A	+	+
+ Elements (Complex task)	-	-	+	-
There-and-Then (Complex task)	+	-	-	-

*Notes.* ++ indicates a large effect ( $d > 0.8$ ); + indicates a moderate effect ( $0.3 < d < 0.8$ ); - indicates a small to no effect ( $d < 0.3$ ); N/A indicates that no studies have investigated the specified variable.

Their meta-analysis (Norris, Sasayama, & Malicka, 2018; Sasayama et al., 2018) has also revealed that a simple task (e.g., reading a passage about a familiar topic) improved L2 learners' task performance in terms of comprehension and that a complex task (e.g., with increased number of elements) led to more interaction among L2 learners.

***Principle 2: When designing tasks, pay attention not only to the level of cognitive load but also to its type***

<sup>1</sup> Note that no studies were found which examined the effect of support on syntactic complexity and accuracy.

When designing L2 tasks, the *level* of cognitive load is not the only aspect of a task that requires consideration. Different *types* of cognitive load are theorized to pose differing effects on the task-doers' attention allocation and in turn their task performance and learning. In the field of cognitive psychology, it has been suggested that cognitive load of a task can come in different types, including germane and extraneous cognitive load (Sweller, 1988, 1994, 2010). Germane load is a good type of complexity that directs learners' attention to their engagement in and learning from the task at hand. This type of load thus encourages L2 learners to push the limits of their interlanguage resources and focus on improved performance and potentially on learning (Sasayama & Norris, in press). Extraneous load, on the other hand, is a bad type of complexity that distracts learners from engaging fully in the given task, and thus does not aid them in improving their performance or acquiring new language. Thus, a complex task with high *germane* load leads to better performance and learning, whereas a complex task with high *extraneous* load impairs performance/learning.

More practically, germane load can be heightened, for example, by increasing the number of similar characters involved in a picture-based narrative task. This manipulation of task design is theorized to push L2 learners to distinguish linguistically between similar characters, and thus draw their attention to the use of the language (e.g., relative clauses, adjectives, prepositional phrases) (Robinson, 2005). Another example of manipulating germane load is by decreasing the time to tell the same personal story to different listeners. This task design encourages learners to pay attention to fluency and how they deliver their story (e.g., Nation, 1989). The level of germane load could also be altered through task instructions: By including assessment criteria in the task instructions, Sasayama (2015; Sasayama & Norris, in press) has shown that L2 learners of English (especially of higher proficiency) were inclined to pay attention to the assessment criteria (i.e., completeness, effectiveness, and creativity of their narrative stories) in an effort to improve their task performances.

Extraneous load, on the other hand, may be increased, for example, when the storyline of a picture-based narrative task is unclear (Sasayama, 2015; Sasayama & Norris, in press; Tavakoli, 2009). When engaging in such a task, L2 learners are required to use their limited attentional resources to figure out the storyline rather than to think about *how* to use the language to deliver their story effectively. Giving a speech spontaneously, without much preparation and practice, can also increase extraneous load and may distract L2 learners from paying attention to improved performance (Skehan, 1998). Another task design element that could increase extraneous load is a surprise element introduced to a task, for instance, by providing new information in the middle of a task or having learners to answer an unanticipated question during a question-and-answer (Q&A) session after a presentation (Skehan, 1998; Skehan & Foster, 1997). The effect of this task design is similar to the no-planning condition; the surprise element does not allow L2 learners to plan ahead of time and thus requires them to use their attentional resources to think *what* to say and *how* to say it simultaneously.

### ***Principle 3: Manipulate germane and extraneous cognitive load strategically***

As we saw above, when designing tasks, it is important to keep in mind that a task can be complex in different ways—whether germane to the task or extraneous—and that germane and extraneous load

has contrasting effects on L2 learners' task performance and learning. High germane load leads to better performance and learning by drawing learners' attention to their use of the language, whereas high extraneous load requires learners to pay attention to non-linguistic aspects of a task and thus distracts them from using their linguistic resources to the fullest extent during task performance. If the point of the task is to draw L2 learners' attention to their use of the language and encourage their language development, then extraneous load may only serve to focus learners on 'getting by' rather than on stretching their interlanguage resources and improve their performance. Thus, a combination of reduced extraneous load and increased germane load is argued to lead to effective task design (Sasayama & Norris, in press; Sweller, 2010).

Does extraneous load then have no role to play in designing effective tasks? The key here is to consider what the purpose of a task may be (Norris et al., 2018). In this domain of research, a large number of studies has investigated the effect of cognitive load on *linguistic* performance and development; however, studies that look into such effects on the content of L2 learners' performance and their learning of task procedures are lacking. While extraneous load may be something to avoid if all we are interested in is improved linguistic performance, it may also be a legitimate demand of real-world, target tasks. In other words, real-world tasks are typically full of extraneous load, and if the point of the task is to help L2 learners learn how to deal with real-world tasks in their L2, then it might well be a good idea to introduce, rather than avoid, extraneous load to a task at hand. For instance, it may not be a good idea to get rid of unanticipated questions from a post-presentation Q&A because this type of question is the reality that our learners likely face in the real world. Instead, it might make more sense to teach them how to deal with unanticipated questions, by helping them acquire strategies to comprehend questions, avoid giving direct answers, and anticipate questions. Thus, a "good" task design depends on the purpose of a task at hand, and for this reason, it is important to manipulate germane load and extraneous load strategically to fulfill the intended purpose.

## DESIGNING L2 TASKS: AN EXAMPLE

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How can the three principles above actually be applied to classroom practice? In this section, I will share my own experiences of the actual implementation of the principles in L2 task design. Below, I will set up a context by introducing an English course I was teaching and the sorts of problems my students were facing, and then share the three sets of tasks I designed to help my students overcome those problems.

### ***The course***

My students were first-year, business majors at a private university in Japan. Their proficiency levels were intermediate to upper-intermediate (with a range of around 400-600 on TOEIC scores). The course I was teaching was a year-long course with a focus on speaking skills. Given their major, I decided to offer a task-based business English course where we simulated working at a company whose corporate language was English. In a nutshell, in this course, students invented their own products and engaged in a variety of business-related tasks. The class was taught entirely in English, and the students engaged in all class activities in English (to the extent possible). The class size was 32. Many of the students felt the need to be able to speak English at their future workplaces and/or understood the value of it.

In the first semester, they were randomly divided into groups of four (so the class had eight groups of four). As a group they engaged in a wide range of business-related tasks, including writing emails, reading about real inventions, and learning about Widget's (Benevides & Valvona, 2008) products. As a main task, each group came up with their own product ideas and polished their ideas by designing a customer survey and collecting responses from their hypothetical customers. Their ideas included such creative products as a "Pen TV" that comes with a projector and lets you watch TV on a large screen anywhere, "Automatic Carry Case," a hands-free carry-on that follows you, and a "Sensorin" that detects the shape of vegetables and fruits by a sensor and cuts them automatically. As a final task, they gave a group presentation about their own invention. At the very end of the semester then, the class voted to choose the best four products out of the eight.

In the second semester, the students worked further on the chosen four best product ideas from the previous semester. The students whose product was chosen as one of the four acted as experts and welcomed new members to their team. Basically, the original group separated into two teams, and two new members joined each team. So, in the second semester, two groups were working on exactly the same product idea (which was an important element of task design as we will see later on). The students improved and elaborated on the original product ideas, considered a variety of ways to make their products better, and created posters to advertise their products. As a final task, each group gave a presentation about their finalized product idea, incorporating what they had learned throughout the year. Of the variety of tasks completed by the students, in this paper, I will particularly focus on the group presentations that the students engaged in at the end of each semester.

## ***The problems***

When my students gave group presentations in the first semester, their presentations per se were quite high in quality. However, they struggled to a great deal with the Q&A session that followed their presentations. The challenges for them seemed to include: (a) They were not at all used to doing Q&A (either in English or Japanese) on the spot, (b) they could not understand the questions, (c) they had not anticipated the questions, and so they did not know what to say, and/or (d) they knew what they wanted to say, but did not know how to say it. With these challenges in mind, I designed a series of tasks to use in the second semester, prior to their second group presentations.

## ***Tasks***

Below, I will outline the three sets of tasks I designed to help my students improve their Q&A performances. Here, I will describe the purpose of each set of tasks, their details, and the theoretical backgrounds (i.e., the task design principles) on which I based my task design.

### **Task 1**

The purpose of the first set of tasks was to help my students improve their ability to comprehend the types of questions that might be typical of a Q&A session following a business presentation. To this end, I made a list of questions, using questions that my more advanced students had asked about their

classmates' inventions the year before (see Figure 1 below). The questions were sequenced in the order of complexity/cognitive load, and they were manipulated by linguistic demands, including the sentence length, word choice, and context of the questions (Skehan, 1998). We started with less complex sentences first, so that the students would not be cognitively overwhelmed and would get used to the task type and procedures gradually before they worked with more complex sentences (Robinson, 2001).

- |   |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>How big is your product?</b></li> <li>2. <b>How heavy is your product?</b></li> <li>3. <b>How many colors does your product come in?</b></li> <li>4. <b>Is your product waterproof?</b></li> <li>5. <b>Does it come with a warranty?</b></li> <li>6. <b>How long does it take to charge the battery?</b></li> <li>7. <b>What's the power source?</b></li> <li>8. <b>How is your product different from other similar products that already exist?</b></li> <li>9. <b>You might have mentioned it in your presentation, but how much is your product again?</b></li> <li>10. <b>In your presentation, you mentioned that you are going to use Pikotaro to promote your product. Could you tell us why?</b></li> </ol> |
|---|

Figure 1. A list of Q&A questions in the order of complexity with the first one being least complex.

In addition, I created an advanced organizer to help my students comprehend the questions (see Figure 2). This advanced organizer was considered to be a type of support, which helps reduce cognitive load of a task. Following the meta-analysis findings (Norris et al., 2018; Sasayama et al., 2018), by reducing cognitive load of the listening task, it was hypothesized that it would improve students' comprehension of the questions. In this task, the advanced organizer was intended to help students learn what to focus on while listening to the questions, which potentially helps to reduce the extraneous load of dealing with the target task (i.e., understanding the questions asked in English). As we will see later on, in Task 3, the students were required to listen to and comprehend questions without this advanced organizer. Thus, it was important to introduce this task design element of support and reduce cognitive load of the task initially, so that the students could pay attention to listening strategies and learn what they should focus on during the Q&A at this point.

	What is the <b>main question word (or words)?</b>	What is the <b>main content word (or words)?</b>
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		

Figure 2. Advanced organizer to aid students with their listening comprehension.

In class, I read aloud the list of questions and asked my students to fill out the advanced organizer. We did the first question together to make sure that everyone understood the task instructions. Then, the students worked on their own on the next four questions, and we checked the answers of these questions. Subsequently, we discussed a variety of strategies to use when they could not catch the question right away. Ideas included: (a) requesting a repetition and (b) checking their understanding of

the question asked. Phrases such as “Could you repeat the question?”, “Can you say that again?”, and “One more time please?” were elicited from the students as a strategy to ask for a repetition of the question. On the other hand, they expressed that they might be able to use phrases like “So, you mean...?”, “You’re asking... Is that right?”, and “Let me see if I understand the question” when they wanted to check whether they understood the question correctly. I then read five more questions aloud from the more complex set of the questions (Questions 5 through 10 in Figure 1). They were instructed to do the same as the first set of questions, but they were also encouraged to ask for a repetition and/or confirm their understanding when necessary. It was interesting to observe my students using the newly learned phrases so readily and quite willingly. As we checked answers, I made sure that the students understood the meaning of the questions, by asking them to define words that I thought would be difficult for them (e.g., warranty, power source) and by allowing them to chat with each other about the meaning of each question (especially Question 10).

## **Task 2**

The next step had to do with being able to actually answer the questions that they comprehended correctly. Thus, the purposes of the second set of tasks were to help students develop their ability to deliver good answers during the Q&A session and, in particular, direct their attention to syntactic complexity and accuracy of their responses. To this end, I asked my students to write down their answers to the questions about the product that they invented, some of which were the ones they had just heard and others were new (see Figure 3 for the list of questions).

- 1. Is your product safe?**
- 2. How big is your product?**
- 3. How heavy is your product?**
- 4. How many colors does your product come in?**
- 5. Is your product waterproof?**
- 6. Is your product shockproof?**
- 7. What’s the power source?**
- 8. Does it come with a warranty?**
- 9. How long does it take to charge the battery?**
- 10. You might have mentioned it in your presentation, but how much is your product again?**
- 11. How do you plan to promote your product?**
- 12. How is your product different from other similar products that already exist?**
- 13. How can you sell the product at such a reasonable price?**
- 14. What would you say if you had to give one challenge of actually developing your product?**

*Figure 3.* A list of Q&A questions used in Task 2.

When choosing questions to be included in Task 2, I made sure that the questions asked were relevant to all groups. (For example, I did not include questions like “Is it tasty?” or “How many flavors does it have?” because not everyone was inventing a food product.) The students were given plenty of time to plan their responses to those questions prior to and during their writing. This availability of planning time was incorporated in the task design here because planning time was shown to be an effective

design feature to direct L2 learners' attention to syntactic complexity and accuracy of their language production (Malicka & Sasayama, 2017), which was what Task 2 was being designed to do.

Additionally, the students were given the following task instructions:

Answer the following questions about your product. Work on your own first, then I will let you share your ideas with your group members. Once you're finished, make sure to check your grammar and word choice.

**Tips: Avoid just saying yes or no, even to a yes-no question! Make sure you add a sentence to elaborate.**

*Example 1) Is your vegetable cutter really safe to use?*

*– Yes, it actually has a sensor to detect human motion, so it does not work when your finger is in it.*

*Example 2) Does your TV come with a warranty?*

*– No, I'm afraid not. But you can buy a three-year warranty for 5000 yen.*

The instructions to check the linguistic aspects of their responses (i.e., the underlined part of the instructions above) were meant to encourage extra attention to be paid to accuracy of their language production. The tips (i.e., what's bolded above), on the other hand, were intended to attract the students' attention to syntactic complexity (see Sasayama & Norris, in press, for the power of task instructions). On the whole, planning time reduced the complexity of the task and, together with the extra task instructions, it was designed to help students develop and expand their interlanguage, so that they would have something appropriate and convincing to say in English.

As seen in the above task instructions, the students worked on the 14 questions individually and then exchanged their answers with their group members. This process allowed them to think more carefully about their product and come to a consensus about details of their product. The students were then asked to practice asking and answering the questions with a partner from a different team. Lastly, in preparation for the next task, we reviewed strategies to use when they could not understand the question and discussed strategies to use if they did not know the answer to the question asked. Given that they were only first-year university students and none of them had worked for a company even as an intern, this discussion proved to be quite difficult for them. After some negotiation, both in English and in Japanese, they suggested that they might be able to say something like "Let me discuss it with my colleagues and get back to you later." As alternatives, I suggested the following phrases: "Sorry, we cannot disclose that information", "Sorry, it's a company's secret", "We hadn't thought of that. We'll definitely think about that. Thank you for the suggestion." It was interesting to observe the students being very engaged in this discussion and taking notes without being instructed to do so. I then pointed out that it is not effective to use this strategy all the time, and so told them that they could use it only once during their final presentation. Overall, Task 2 was designed to reduce extraneous load by providing planning time and increase germane load by giving the extra task instructions.

### Task 3

As a final set of tasks, I wanted to give the students the opportunity to benefit from actually answering questions in a simulated Q&A session, while encouraging them to develop the fluency of their responses. With this purpose in mind, I had my students give a one-minute pitch about their product and engage in a simulated Q&A session. As preparation, I had the students pair up with a member of the other team that was working on the same original product idea (see *the course* above). They were instructed to give a one-minute pitch about their product idea to their partner using the poster they created earlier in the semester (see Figure 4 for a student's sample work).



Figure 4. A sample of one student's poster.

As a listener, their job was to spy on the other team's improvements from the original idea and thus to find out as much as possible about what their competitor's improved product was like. They were also instructed to ask questions after their partner's one-minute pitch to find out more about the product. This scenario-based task was intended to create a meaningful, authentic information gap and encourage interaction to bring about L2 acquisition (Long, 1996; Pica, 1994). As an extra instruction, I told them that they would have to ask at least three questions to their partner and that one could be from the list of the questions from Task 2, but the other two had to be new. This potentially extraneous load was introduced to make the task more realistic and closer to what they would experience in their final presentation (and in the real world).

The students did this task cycle three times with different partners from the same competitor group. This task repetition reduced extraneous load of having to deal with giving a one-minute pitch about their product idea and asking and answering new questions, and thus freed up some attentional resources to

be devoted to linguistic aspects of their utterances and helped them focus on fluency (Malicka & Sasayama, 2017). At the very end of Task 3, each group gathered together to share the information they collected, shared the sorts of questions they were asked, checked their answers to the new questions, and finally planned how to make their product better than and distinct from their competitor's. For homework, they were encouraged to anticipate other questions that might come up after their final presentation and prepare answers to these anticipated questions.

## OBSERVATIONS OF THE STUDENTS' Q&A PERFORMANCES AFTER TRAINING

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Before closing this paper, I would like to share some observations of my students' Q&A performances after they experienced the above mentioned three sets of tasks. Overall, their performances improved considerably. It was especially impressive to see that they were able to avoid silence by either asking for repetition/clarification of the questions asked or by providing answers right away. Thus, the most striking improvement was their improved fluency. The following comment from a student illustrates this improvement:

*In the last semester, I didn't prepare anything, so I could not answer completely. On the contrary, I prepared some of the knowledge and answers in this semester, so I could answer some questions smoothly. [sic]*

Another big improvement was noted in linguistic complexity or elaboration. In the first semester, most of the students answered a yes-no question with either a yes or a no. In the second semester, however, many of them elaborated on their yes/no answer somehow. For example, one student asked whether "Sensorin," the automatic vegetable and fruit cutter, was safe to use. In response, one of the presenters said "Yes, it is safe even for children." This elaborated use of the language was not something I observed in the first semester, and I was impressed by this quick improvement. Lastly, it is interesting to note that the series of tasks introduced above made the target task of answering questions during the Q&A easier to handle, at least for some students:

*Q&A session is not so difficult because it was easy to expect what will we be asked so I think it was easier than last semester. If I'll have such like this occasion I want to understand perfectly what I asked only once. [sic]*

All in all, through the experience of applying the theories of L2 task design to my own teaching, I strongly felt the importance and effectiveness of engaging in evidence-based L2 task design.

## CONCLUSION

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In this paper, I emphasized the importance of being mindful of the level and type of cognitive load when designing L2 tasks. Research suggests that cognitive load can be manipulated by changing inherent design characteristics, implementation conditions, and language demands, and that a task with varying degrees of cognitive load has different effects on L2 learner's task performances. Furthermore, manipulation of cognitive load through task design has been shown to be an effective way to encourage

L2 learners to pay attention to various aspects of their task performances (e.g., content, comprehension, syntactic complexity, accuracy, lexis, fluency of production) and their interlanguage development as a result. It is also important to distinguish between a good type (i.e., germane load) and a bad type of cognitive load (i.e., extraneous load), because these two types of load have contrasting effects on L2 learners' task performance. Germane load encourages learners to pay attention to linguistic aspects of their task performance and thus likely leads to improved performance/learning, whereas extraneous load distracts learners from attending to the task at hand and thus tends to deteriorate performance/learning. Thus, if the point of the task is to draw L2 learners' attention to their use of the language and encourage their language development, then extraneous load may be something to be avoided. However, extraneous load may also present legitimate demands of real-world, target tasks that cannot be avoided in real life. Pedagogic task design, therefore, should be about balancing germane and extraneous load, rather than increasing germane load and eliminating extraneous load completely all the time. In conclusion, it is important to use germane load strategically to help learners develop their interlanguage and communication performance, while challenging them with real-world extraneous load so that they will also be able to acquire task-relevant procedures and deal with target tasks in real life beyond the sheltered classroom environment.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Shoko Sasayama, PhD, is Project Assistant Professor at the University of Tokyo. Her academic interests include language pedagogy (especially task design), cognitive psychology, L2 assessment, and attitudes and individual differences. Shoko is a strong advocate for the use of L2 research for the purpose of informing practice/teaching and for the betterment of L2 education worldwide.

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# LESSON PLANS

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## A Market Research Survey Project

*Nicholas Marx - Kanazawa Seiryō University*

This is a multi-lesson, task-based survey project aimed at post-secondary intermediate learners that also could be adapted for lower or higher proficiency levels. The project ultimately leads to the development of simple market research surveys and group presentations to explain the results using PowerPoint slideshows with accompanying charts and graphs.

### GOALS

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- Understanding basic survey-making strategies
- Linking business and research concepts together
- Collecting and reporting survey data
- Familiarizing students with the vocabulary needed to present statistical information
- Connecting data and ideas within presentations
- Promoting problem solving and collaborative learning

### MATERIALS

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- Computer and projector
- Examples of market research surveys
- Access to computer with PowerPoint or other presentation software
- Student internet connection for conducting basic online research
- Worksheets for making surveys and collecting data

### PRE-TASK (LESSON 1)

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In this introductory lesson, the instructor should start by showing students a few examples of surveys from different websites with survey templates. One example of a website to find such templates is *SurveyMonkey* (see <<https://www.surveymonkey.com/mp/consumer-behavior-survey-template/>> and <<https://www.surveymonkey.com/mp/skin-care-products-survey-template/>>). Other sources of templates can be found online as well (e.g., see <[http://www.marketest.co.uk/market-research-questionnaire/158/restaurant\\_customers\\_habits/](http://www.marketest.co.uk/market-research-questionnaire/158/restaurant_customers_habits/)>).

Beyond showing the survey templates, it is also advisable to walk the students through several different surveys to give them a better idea of the flow of well-constructed surveys. Prepare

some examples of both good and bad surveys that can be critiqued in class to highlight both the types of questions asked and the overall continuity needed to make a good survey. Since the theme of this task is market research, selecting examples of surveys in this area would be beneficial.

## PRE-TASK PREPARATION

Provide students with a background scenario for their survey project. For example, the students could be in charge of creating a new service or product that is aimed at student-aged consumers. Ask the students what are things that young people are interested in these days or what they think could be a good business idea. Give an example of a product and ask them some questions about their interest in the product or service (e.g., Would they buy it or use it? How much would they pay to buy or use it?).

Show the students some examples of market research surveys from the internet. Walk through answering them together as a class. Let the students know that they need to develop their own market research in groups by completing a series of steps: Think of a product idea, create questions to check market interest, practice the survey, adjust the survey, collect data, and finally, present the data to the class using PowerPoint. While any size group can be utilized, groups of four students tend to allow for both an appropriate amount of collaborative dialogue and a larger sample size for the survey.

## PRE-TASK PART 1

The idea of the first part of the pre-task lesson is to get the students acquainted with surveys and the notion of continuity between the questions asked. In this stage, the instructor should focus more on what a good survey contains. In particular, it is advisable to direct students' attention to the vocabulary and grammar used in such questions.

After reiterating the key features of good surveys, the students will create a very brief practice survey. This practice survey should be a total of five questions and include one or two questions on demographic information (e.g., age, gender, hometown, job), buying patterns (e.g., what they buy, when they buy it), and the purported benefits desired of a product/service (e.g., what the person wants from the product/service).

## PRE-TASK PART 2

Following the creation of the practice survey, the students will go around the class asking their peers to respond to their surveys while recording answers on a prepared worksheet (see Appendix A). The instructor may want to assign groups or set up some form of system for this to be done more efficiently.

During this stage, it is important to provide some feedback to the students about the continuity of their practice surveys. It may also be advisable to show them how to prepare alternative questions if needed. If the students make questions dependent on the answer of the previous questions, they will also need to have alternative questions to accompany them. Having the students prepare short presentations on their results may be a good homework assignment to consider if time permits.

## MAIN TASK (LESSONS 2 & 3)

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In lessons 2 and 3, the students are now prepared to work on the main task:

**In four-member groups, develop market research on an idea that interests you. The market for this research are students at your university. First, create a 5-10 question survey that measures interest. Then, each group must collect data from a total of 60 respondents (20 can be from this class). Ask other students at this university your survey questions and record their answers on the handouts provided. Finally, you will give a presentation on the results of your survey. Be sure to connect your survey data with ideas in your final presentation.**

### MAIN TASK PART 1 (LESSON 2)

During this part of the task, the groups will create their market research surveys and begin collecting data from their classmates. Allowing students to use their smartphones to search for related information, the instructor should monitor group progress and assist the groups as needed.

After the creation of their surveys, split the members into groups and let them ask the members of these new groups their survey questions and collect their data. The rest of the data can be collected outside of the class from other students at the university.

### MAIN TASK PART 2 (LESSON 3)

In the second part of the task, the students will create PowerPoint slideshow presentations in their groups and prepare to present their findings to their class. Before this part of the lesson, the instructor should show them some examples. One suggestion is to show them an example slide with a pie chart and another example slide with a bar chart. Since many students often have little knowledge of graphs and statistics, illustrative examples like these make basic charts and graphs easier to understand. Along with these examples, show them how to connect the data they are presenting to create a logical flow.

Following these examples, have the students begin to make their PowerPoint slideshows with the instructor supervising and giving instruction when needed. The students will have until the next class to prepare for their presentations. The instructor should inform the students that they need to find time to complete their slides and practice their presentation deliveries

outside of class. Therefore, it may be advisable to exchange contact information with one another. Along with this, the instructor should inform the groups on good presentations skills (e.g., posture, voice projection, eye contact, etc.).

## POST-TASK (LESSON 4)

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In class, each group will give a presentation reporting on their market research with an accompanying PowerPoint slideshow. Students in the audience should take notes on each group's main theme as well as the key points from their presentations. The instructor can make a worksheet for this, but having the students write their notes down on a piece of paper is suitable.

### INSTRUCTOR FEEDBACK AND SELF-REFLECTION

After the presentations, the instructor should give the learners feedback and allow the opportunity for self-reflection in groups. The instructor should ask the groups to talk about what they think they did well and what they could have done better. A rubric for evaluating the presentations is shared below.

	<b>Presentation Skills</b>	<b>PowerPoint</b>	<b>Content</b>
Excellent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear voice</li> <li>• Standing straight</li> <li>• Good eye contact</li> <li>• Positive attitude</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Easy to understand</li> <li>• Use of visuals</li> <li>• Good balance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Easy to understand</li> <li>• Good linking of ideas and data</li> <li>• Clear objective</li> </ul>
Good	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less clear voice</li> <li>• Leaning slightly</li> <li>• Some eye contact</li> <li>• Good attitude</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Easy to understand</li> <li>• Use of visuals</li> <li>• Somewhat consistent formatting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Easy to understand</li> <li>• Linking of ideas and data could be better</li> <li>• Somewhat clear objective</li> </ul>
Satisfactory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can't be heard easily</li> <li>• Leaning on podium</li> <li>• Little eye contact</li> <li>• OK attitude</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Somewhat easy to understand</li> <li>• Not many use of visuals</li> <li>• Inconsistent formatting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Somewhat easy to understand</li> <li>• Linking of ideas and data could be better</li> <li>• Somewhat clear objective</li> </ul>
Poor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can't be heard</li> <li>• Bad posture</li> <li>• No eye contact</li> <li>• Not serious</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficult to understand</li> <li>• No visuals</li> <li>• Inconsistent formatting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can't be understood</li> <li>• No linking of ideas and data</li> <li>• Objective unclear</li> </ul>

### POTENTIAL VARIATIONS

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The amount of support you give the students can vary by need. As a result, the timeline may need to be extended if more time is needed for explanation or assistance.

If time permits, one thing the instructor can do is to continue this theme with a business idea project where the learners create a product or service and have to pitch this idea. The students can use the market research data to form their business project.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Nicholas Marx currently teaches at Kanazawa Seiryō University in Ishikawa, Japan. He holds an MA in TESOL from University College London, Institute of Education. His main areas of interest are language anxiety, affective factors, collaborative learning, extensive reading, and task-based pedagogy.





# Storytelling: Tapping Student Imagination

*Simon Rowe – Language Centre, Kwansai Gakuin University*

This is a lesson plan suitable for a single two-hour writing workshop, or as a series of 90-minute task-based lessons within an intensive writing program. It draws primarily on students' personal experiences and encourages them to use imagination and to think creatively. It may be adapted to beginner, intermediate, and advanced language learner levels.

## GOALS

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- Encourage creative thought
- Reinforce writing processes
- Demonstrate the link between fact and fiction
- Familiarise students with the building blocks of a narrative and provide them with a simple framework for storytelling
- Underscore the importance of storytelling as a form of personal expression
- Produce a short story, or a body of writing (over several lessons) to be shared and/or published among students

## MATERIALS

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- Large whiteboard or several smaller whiteboards
- Student writing materials
- Internet connection and projector for viewing of short videos in class

## PREPARATION

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Arrange students into groups of three or four members. Have each member retell a popular folktale in its most basic form without revealing its name. Encourage members of the group to guess it correctly. Meanwhile, create on the whiteboard a list of plot types used in popular storytelling such as those outlined by Booker (2004): Quest, Tragedy, Comedy, Monster, etc. (see <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Seven\\_Basic\\_Plots](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Seven_Basic_Plots)> for a brief overview), and give example book/movie titles for each. Ask students if they can match their own folktale to a specific plot type. Have them write this on the whiteboard. Now turn to themes used in popular stories such as Family, Revenge, Success, Teamwork, etc. (see <<https://writersedit.com/fiction-writing/10-most-popular-literary-theme-examples/>>) for a more extensive list with examples. Again, have students add these to their own folktale, 'building outward' in mind-map fashion on the board. "Storytelling" can be written in the centre.

## PRE-TASK

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### THINKING

Have students take a few minutes to think alone about a memorable experience they have had in their lives. Encourage them to make notes and to think about their experience in terms of themes. Put guiding questions on the board: What happened? Where did it happen? Who was involved? How did you feel? and so on. Have students return to their groups and relate their stories orally to other members, allowing time for questions, comments, and feedback. Explain to students that (fictional) characters' actions and reactions to events around them often mimic those of real life (underscoring the premise that 'fiction is based on fact'). Encourage students to think about how they might shape a personal experience into a fictional one. Draw their attention back to the plot types and have them consider their stories as a basis of a fictional tale.

Examples:

- Air travel and flying through turbulence (*Voyage-and-return; Cast Away, The Martian*)
- Scuba diving or snorkelling for the first time (*Monster; JAWS, The Deep*)
- Holding a party (Comedy; *The Hangover, The Party*).

Now introduce story structure. Draw this as a series of three boxes on the board and write, 'Beginning, Middle, and End'. Students should recognise this structure from presentation writing lessons, i.e., Introduction, Body, and Conclusion.

## TASK 1

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### PLANNING

Have students return to their notebooks and plan a fictional short story based on their own experience. They will be required to note down themes and plot type, and to structure their story within the three boxes. Choose a popular movie story (e.g. *JAWS* or *ROCKY*) and create on the whiteboard a basic plan to help students make the 'mental leap' from fact to fiction. Again, encourage imaginative thinking.

## TASK 2

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### WRITING

Cue two short TED-Ed videos:

- Nalo Hopkinson's (2015) *How to write descriptively* - 4:32
  - Available online at <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RSorZTtwgP4>>
- Victoria Smith's (2017) *How to make your writing suspenseful* - 4:35

- Available online at <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xjKruwAfZWk>>.

Remind students that the process of storytelling (in written form) requires multiple drafts and that the first draft is exactly that. Allow 30-45 minutes for them to develop their ideas, encouraging them to write freely and expansively.

Emphasis here is on creative expression; instructors should therefore focus on idea development, story structure, and interest/entertainment value, rather than spelling and grammar, which can be addressed later on.

## TASK 3

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- REFLECTING

Within a 90-minute class, it is unlikely all students will achieve a completed story. This is not a concern if the writing program is ongoing, as students may return to the next session with their finished first drafts. It is important, however, for students to share their stories with other group members, to give feedback, and even speculate on possible story endings. Allow 15-20 minutes for this.

As part of the reflective process, students receive insight into the developmental process of creative writing, improve confidence through idea sharing, and understand that everyone reads from different perspectives.

## POST-TASK

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Write the logline (plot summary) of a popular movie/book story on the board, e.g., 'A woman and her crew battle aliens aboard their ship in deep space' or, 'An alien finds itself left behind on Earth and befriends a young boy who helps him to return.'

Have students summarise their own plots in one or two sentences. Ask them to write this on the board. Students can return to their groups and discuss which stories might interest them most.

## FOLLOW-UP

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Within an ongoing writing program, focus can shift to other aspects of storytelling, such as dialogue, setting, messages, and characters, all of which will serve to further enrich students' narratives.

If students are comfortable with sharing their completed stories with a wider audience, it is worth considering Facebook or Google Sites (closed group) as an easy-to-use publishing platform.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Simon Rowe teaches academic and creative writing at Kwansei Gakuin University in Japan. He is author of the short fiction collection *Good Night Papa: Short Stories from Japan and Elsewhere* (Atlas Jones & Co., 2017).

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