

TASK TEMPLATES

A. Assembling an Object

Description

Looking at a photograph of an object, a student gives step-by-step directions to another student who attempts to assemble an object (e.g., a car made from Lego® pieces, a collage made from multiple images, etc.). The student assembling the object can ask questions to clarify the directions.

Materials Needed

- photograph of an assembled object
- components to be assembled into the photographed object

Preparation

1. Devise an object that is easily taken apart and reassembled (ready made manipulables like Legos® or Tinkertoys® work well, but you can also use commonly available materials such as toothpicks, blocks or paper strips). The object can be a common object (e.g., a car, a house, a chair) or an abstraction.
2. Build the object and take a photo of it.
3. Print out copies of the photograph.

In Class

1. Put students in pairs (a direction giver and an assembler) and explain the rules of engagement (No peeking at the photograph! No gestures! Only verbal directions!).
2. Give the direction giver the photograph; give the components to the assembler.
3. On the board, write a few strategic phrases to help students when they get stuck (e.g., “What did you say?” “Could you repeat that?”). Explain the importance of circumlocution to overcome lack of vocabulary knowledge. You might have two students perform a variation of the task in English to help the class grasp what they are about to do in terms of the demands (linguistic, cognitive, communicative).
4. Turn the task into a friendly competition. Who can correctly assemble the object first?!

Further Suggestions

1. While this task works well as a pair activity, you might prefer to turn it into a whole class activity. In that case, choose someone to assemble the object and have him or her stand at the front of the class with all the pieces laid out on a table. The rest of the class gives directions while looking at a photograph of the assembled object.
2. Preteach key vocabulary items (e.g. colors, sizes, prepositions, verbs).

3. The teacher can guide the interaction by asking general yes/no questions: “Does the green block go on top of the red block?”
4. The difficulty of this task depends on the number of pieces as well as the range of shapes and sizes and colors. You can lessen the difficulty level by decreasing the number of pieces. Or, conversely, you can increase the difficulty level of this task by including superfluous pieces called *distractors*. Including more pieces than needed obliges the speaker to give more detailed and accurate descriptions so that the assembler can distinguish the necessary from the unnecessary pieces.
5. Don’t limit yourself to ready-made, commercial manipulables—create your own! For example, for a task that requires students to describe facial features, you could use the game Mr. Potato Head®, but why not use a bank of features culled from magazine images instead?
6. If there are native speakers available, have them perform this task to gain a better understanding of the linguistic demands.