



MODULE 3

3.6 ADAPTING YOUR MATERIAL

As we will see in Module 4, the **material** used in class plays a **fundamental role** in making your tasks engaging. Teachers and students can bring to class material they find interesting, for example, a poster they like or a photo they have taken. Also, there may be cases where students are the only "material" in the lesson.

How can you adapt any ready-made activity into tasks?

Answer 6 simple questions. If all the answers are yes, then the activity is a task and you can use it for your TBLT curriculum!

1. Is the activity a work plan?

A task should be a work plan for the learners: it should inform them how to work and what they are expected to do. It might lead them or not to communicative behaviour, for example, it might request learners to speak or write something.

2. Is the focus of the activity primarily on meaning?

In the activity, a **gap** should exist, asking for **opinion, information** or giving **reasons** so the learners can be motivated to use the language, choosing to express themselves as they prefer. In TBLT, it is vital to distinguish **communication tasks** that focus primarily **on meaning**, from **language practice activities that focus on language form**. These should not be confused, or combined in one activity, as it happens in many textbook activities. Ask yourself "Is the example dialogue just an example or does it require the learners to follow it word by word, even if native speakers would rarely use this dialogue structure?".

3. Is there some relation to real-world activities?

Tasks can be based on a **linguistic activity found in the real world** or it can be an activity constructed for the classroom. However, in either case, while doing the task and using the language, while asking questions, giving answers and expressing an opinion, it should be as it happens in the real world. For example, a task in which the names of the organs of the body have to be identified by their definitions, does not reflect something that doctors are usually expected to do, but exposes medical students to the vocabulary and expressions they may need when talking to a patient.



4. Does the activity involve any of the four language skills?

A task should require learners to **listen** or **read** a text and show how they understand it, produce a text, oral or written (**talk**, **write**), or combine receptive and productive skills. Remember the topic we have seen before with the language skills.

5. Does the activity engage any cognitive processes?

An activity to be a task should engage selecting, classifying, ordering, reasoning and evaluating information in order to complete it. These procedures influence the choice of language but lets the learners free to think and choose the final grammar form or vocabulary they wish to use.

6. Does the task have a clear communicative goal/ outcome?

A task has a **non-linguistic outcome**, which serves as the **goal of the activity for the learners**, and which indicates when this is completed. Textbook activities may give learners topics to discuss, but is there a clear purpose to the discussion, beyond simply practicing language? Is there a reason to listen to what classmates say? Asking and answering in a traditional class rarely produces authentic-sounding dialogues in which learners are genuinely engaged. This can be changed with small adjustments.

Let's check on these two different versions of the same activity: **Going shopping**.



VERSION 1

Look at Mary's shopping list.

Then look at the list of items in Nora's store.

Mary's shopping list:

- 1 apples
- 2 eggs
- 3 spelt flour
- 4 milk
- 5 biscuits
- 6 jam

Nora's store list:

- 1 bread
- 2 salt
- 3 oranges
- 4 tins of fish
- 5 Coca Cola
- 6 spelt flour
- 7 whole wheat flour
- 8 sugar
- 9 curry powder
- 10 biscuits
- 11 milk
- 12 baked beans

Work with a partner. One person is Mary, and the other person is Nora. Make conversation like this:

Mary: Good morning. Do you have any flour?

Nora: Yes, I do.

Or

Mary: Good morning. Do you have any jam?

Nora: No, I am sorry. I do not have any.

VERSION 2:

Mary is going to buy at Nora's store.

Work in pairs. One is Mary and has Mary's shopping list and the other is Nora and has Nora's store list.

Mary's shopping list:

- 1 apples
- 2 eggs
- 3 spelt flour
- 4 milk
- 5 biscuits
- 6 jam

Nora's store list:

- 1 bread
- 2 salt
- 3 oranges
- 4 tins of fish
- 5 Coca Cola
- 6 spelt flour
- 7 whole wheat flour
- 8 sugar
- 9 curry powder
- 10 biscuits
- 11 milk
- 12 baked beans

Make conversation between the two of you while Mary is at Nora's store.

Then, write down what items Mary was able to buy at Nora's store.

Are both versions tasks?

The version on the left is obviously more of an exercise than a task. The work plan requires students to participate in the module. They use "of/of" and "some of" in questions and answers and this shows. Thus, it asks users to substitute elements in the given sentences, so it is not easy to lead students towards the kind of language used in the real world. Moreover, it is not cognitively demanding and the result does not include any defined products.

The version on the right is a task. Student A has Mary's shopping list and student B has Nora's list of items from the shop, and the resulting gap requires a focus on



meaning. Participants are left to choose their own language resources (as model sentences are removed). Finally, an outcome is introduced by asking students to write down which items Mary can buy.

Thus, a pre-packaged activity can easily be transformed with some slight adaptations into a task! You can also use these questions when creating a task from scratch. So, a ready-made activity can be easily changed into a task with some light adaptations! You could also use these questions when you create a task from scratch.

