

Gap-fill exercises



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Often hear people describing ‘ gap-fills’ as practice tasks. They seem to be common suggestions for Controlled Practice. I see a lot of value in the use of different variations of gap-fill exercises for things like: drawing attention to patterns, checking understanding, discovery learning (if designed properly), etc. But I don’t see them as being practice.

1) Before the Olympics I _____ (visit) China three times.

In this task the learner needs to do only one thing (change the verb tense), and write only two words (‘ had visited’). As a diagnostic test or as a checking task to see if Ss recognise which form is appropriate, it might be useful. Can we really call that practice though?

They don’t need to interact or communicate in any way.

There is pretty much no focus on meaning.

They don’t need to produce a whole sentence.

They don’t even need to produce a whole clause.

Shouldn’t practice require more production than this? A whole clause, at least, surely.

What’s everyone else think?

Hi Heath

I pretty much agree with you. That term ‘ practice’is very much misused in our profession I think. The question I often ask myself when tempted to use it is, ‘ Practice what?’

It's important as teachers that we know what our learners are practicing when they do activities like the one you suggest otherwise we are just 'doing' things and filling time. As you say there are good reasons for using those kinds of activities and understanding those reasons will help us develop meaningful lessons for our students that have direction and achieve real goals.

Students are often asked to listen to tapes or to their teacher talking, but it can be just as useful to encourage them to listen to each other in a more active way. Learning to listen to each other more carefully can build their ability and confidence in real-life situations, in which they will need to focus on both listening and speaking. The following activities are a fun way of getting students to concentrate more and to remember information. Divide the class into two teams A and B. Ask one student at a time to come to the front of the class and read aloud a passage which you have chosen, e. g. a story or newspaper article. Then ask them to read it aloud again, but to make some changes. Each time a lie (or change) is read out, the students must stand up. The first team to stand up gets a point. This game requires students to listen carefully and encourages them to remember important information and details. I tried it and I found this is quite good to build the students' confidence in both listening and speaking. Many students are fearful of listening, and can be disheartened when they listen to something but feel they understand very little. It is also harder to concentrate on listening if you have little interest in a topic or situation.

Moreover, before listening I always have some pre-listening activities :

Pre-learning vocabulary

When we listen in our first language we can usually concentrate on the overall meaning because we know the meaning of the vocabulary. For students, large numbers of unknown words will often hinder listening, and certainly lower confidence. Select some vocabulary for the students to study before listening, perhaps matching words to definitions, followed by a simple practice activity such as filling the gaps in sentences, Acquiring knowledge

Students may have limited general knowledge about a topic. Providing knowledge input will build their confidence for dealing with a listening. This could be done by giving a related text to read, or, a little more fun, a quiz. ..

Predicting content

Once we know the context for something, we are able to predict possible content. Try giving students a choice of things that they may or may not expect to hear, and ask them to choose those they think will be mentioned. So they'll find it easy when they listen. After 2 month, I did find that my students are more interested in listening, so I do less pre-activities . Of course, I will check this method is effective or not in my class. I will have a test and find out the result. After a week, I have another test, in listening of course, I find out the students who was in the top of the last test has good mark, too.