



Sensations Webinars for E N G L I S H Teachers

November



Fran Watkins

Teacher trainer,
teacher, exam
and materials
writer

Advancing intermediate learners in ELT: helping intermediate learners to feel stretched and motivated

All attendees will receive a certificate of attendance and slides via email link 24 hours after the webinar.



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E N G L I S H

Webinars for teachers

**ADVANCING INTERMEDIATE
LEARNERS IN ELT: HELPING
INTERMEDIATE LEARNERS TO
FEEL STRETCHED AND
MOTIVATED**



Fran Watkins
ELT Specialist

We'll explore how to:

- understand the 'intermediate plateau'
- help B1+ learners process language more deeply
- implement text-level tasks effectively



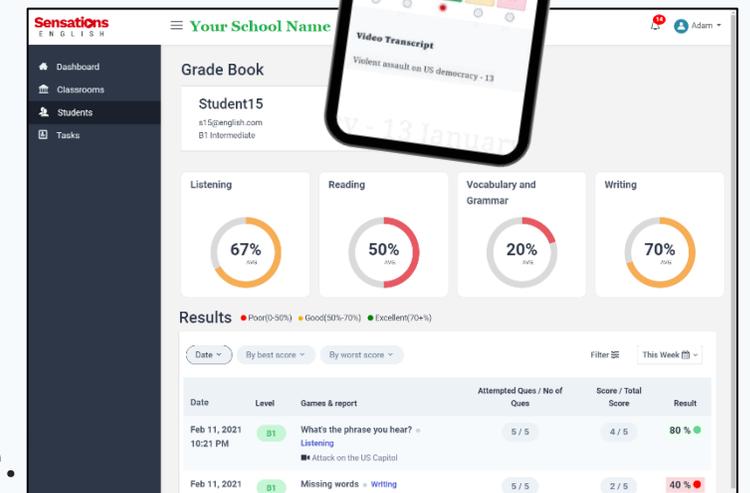
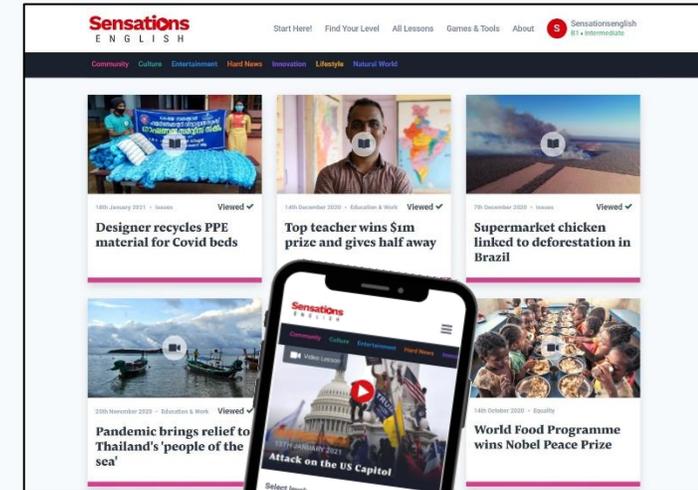
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Overview

This session aims to:

- Suggest why intermediate learners appear to plateau
- Provide some practical tools and strategies to help learners feel they're making progress, learning new elements and feeling challenged
- They will be challenged in terms of lexis, grammar but also in terms of discourse and syntax



What is the reason for the intermediate plateau?

Is this
perception
real or
imagined?





Some of the issues involved

A historic approach to language learning

- Even today, grammar is often the main frame in language teaching, around which other elements are wrapped, at least in many GE classrooms and coursebooks.



That means that learners' development tends to be measured by Ts and themselves in grammatical terms to a large degree.



Traditions in language teaching persist

Given that syllabuses often revolve around grammar, then assessment is also frequently largely grammar-based.



And teachers' expectations/our training often compounds this.



But why else does grammar have such an iron grip on language teaching?



... as well as historical reasons ...

- Grammar makes sense of patterns in language and for many learners, it's invaluable to give them these footholds.
- Grammar gives us a 'way in' to the apparent chaos and enormity of learning a language
- And it makes assessment easier and fairer as it focuses on discrete items of language



Grammar helps us makes sense of language

**Grammar gives us a
manageable access path,
through a thick jungle
of language ...**





And it can also feel incremental ...





And there's another reason that we sense there is an 'intermediate plateau'

If you judge grammar around tenses, then much of the grammar is often "covered" at **B1 pre** and then revisited or just enlarged on at both **B1+ and B2**

PRE B1 – verb tenses	UPPER B2 – verb tenses
Present simple and cont Future – will/going to/present contin Past simple and contin Present perfect Used to Passive 1st and 2nd conditionals Past perfect + relative clauses modals	Future forms Narrative tenses – past simple, past contin and past perfect Present perfect – simple and contin Used to + would Passive + causative Conditionals + wishes / regrets + Relative clauses – defining and non-defining Modals Cleft sentences, present participle clauses, reported speech

Global Pre + B2



And then there's motivation

It's feasible that many learners lose motivation at this stage in their learning of English.

- This may be because it's **their progress seems slower/ perceived** to be getting **more difficult**. At the start, the progress seems fast.
- They feel like they've already **covered the bulk of the grammar** which might in their eyes equate with the language, yet they feel the language is still challenging.
- They may be **frustrated** at their inability to speak fluently. They may not understand how language learning 'works', e.g. the gap between understanding and producing language.
- The **novelty** of learning a new language has worn off.
- They may have **realised** (consciously or unconsciously) that they can now **get by** in the language



There's an inherent fuzziness in the middle stages ..

1





What is the difference between levels? A little bit of analysis ...

TASK

What for you makes a B1pre-int READING text different from a B1+ text? We're talking receptively, but ...





Museum of Failure: video

[Click here to watch the video](#)



Comparing texts: what makes the second one harder?

B1 PRE extract

- Washington DC has opened an art gallery which is called the Museum of Failure (12) Johanna Guttmann organised the exhibition (6). Guttmann's trying to change people's opinion about failure (9)
- The exhibition started in 2017 in Sweden (7). It includes ideas from around the world that failed (9). Many of these ideas are from famous companies like Starbucks and Oreo.(11)
- Starbucks tried to sell a coffee drink with olive oil (10). But this sent customers to the toilet (7). Trump's Monopoly game was too complicated (6) So, not many people bought it (6). Oreo made biscuits with unusual flavours, which many people found unpleasant (11).

TASK: How do they differ? Key areas.

B1+ extract

- Johanna Guttmann has put on an art exhibition called the Museum of Failure in Washington DC (16). The Museum of Failure intends to start conversations about the importance of failure (13).
- The Museum of Failure exhibition first opened in 2017 in Sweden (11). It displays the failed products and inventions of successful companies from around the world, but mainly from the US. (19)
- Some of the big names include Starbucks and Oreo. (9) Starbucks attempted to sell coffee mixed with olive oil, which upset customers' tummies.(13) One Trump themed Monopoly board game resulted in low sales, as it was too complex. Meanwhile, Oreo's unusual new flavours turned customers off.



Comparing texts: what makes the second one harder?

B1 PRE extract

- Washington DC has **opened** an art gallery which is called the Museum of Failure (12) Johanna Guttmann organised the exhibition (6). Guttmann's **trying to change people's opinion about failure** (9)
- The **exhibition** started in 2017 in Sweden (7). It includes **ideas** from around the world **that failed** (9). Many of these ideas are from **famous companies** like Starbucks and Oreo.(11)
- Starbucks **tried** to sell a coffee drink with olive oil (10). But this **sent customers to the toilet** (7). **Trump's Monopoly game was too complicated** (6) So, not many people bought it (6). Oreo made biscuits with unusual flavours, which many people **found unpleasant** (11).

TASK: How do they differ? Key areas.

B1+ extract

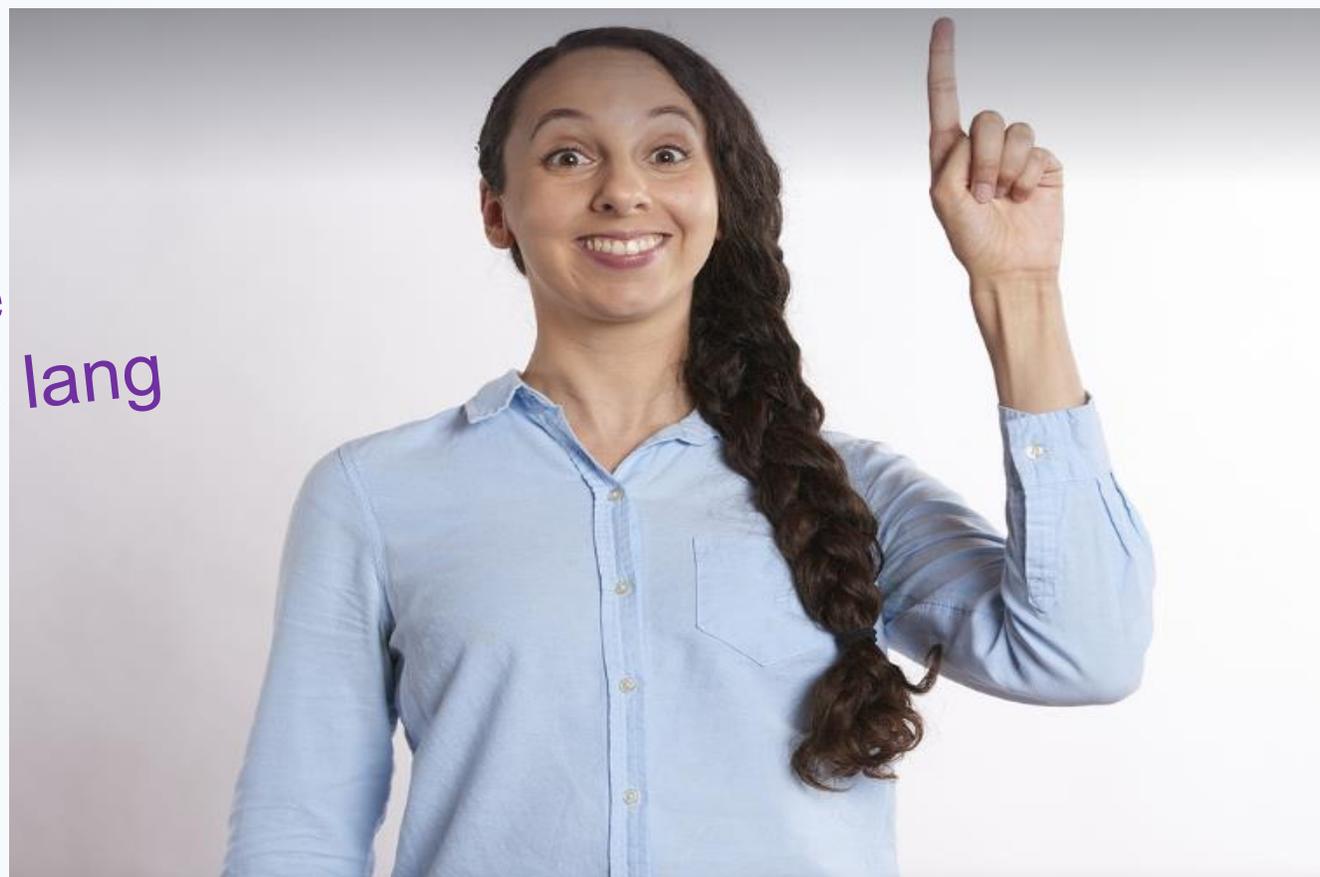
- Johanna Guttmann has **put on** an art exhibition called the Museum of Failure in Washington DC (16). The Museum of Failure intends to **start conversations about the importance of failure** (13).
- The **Museum of Failure exhibition** first opened in 2017 in Sweden (11). It **displays the failed products and inventions of successful companies** from around the world, but **mainly from the US**. (19)
- Some of **the big names** include Starbucks and Oreo. (9) Starbucks **attempted** to sell coffee mixed with olive oil, **which upset customers' tummies**.(13) One **Trump themed Monopoly board game resulted in low sales**, **as** it was too complex. **Meanwhile**, Oreo's **unusual new flavours** turned customers **off**.



Understanding level differences in reading texts can be helpful

- It can give us insight into potential areas for work in the classroom.

It makes us think: how can we get learners to focus on some lang features which are “the next level up”?





Using texts to stretch and challenge intermediate learners





For B1 learners, we need to milk the texts

- Texts are often rich with language and language features. These are waiting to be exploited.
- As teachers, we need to go beyond a cursory comprehension exercise. We can try to get learners to REALLY focus on the elements of the text.
- This is true of all levels, but perhaps particularly to stretch our intermediate learners





Taking a closer look at language in texts

- Analysis would normally come post various comprehension tasks, so the **CONTENT** is understood.
- Ask learners to do some closer analysis + productive work





Vocabulary: 3 easy-to-pret analysis exercises

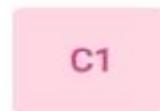
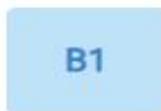


Video Lesson

HARD NEWS - Business & Money
13TH OCTOBER 2023

Museum of Failure opens in USA

Select level:



Levels ?





Vocabulary: 3 ideas



1 Find the synonym for

a) famous b) large companies c)organised d) tried

FOR DIFFERENTIATION: Provide the 1st letter (or last/ no help for stronger ls!) Put in order of text.

FAMOUS: S /or(L)

LARGE AND IMPORTANT COMPANIES: (*info*) B

ORGANISE (AN EXHIBITION) P..... O (phrasal verb)

TRIED: A



Vocabulary: 3 ideas

2 Collocations/fixed phrases: Get ss to match the two parts.



art exhibition, successful companies, olive oil, upset your stomach, board game, social media, take risks, chicken wings, low sales, share your experience

Then students categorize, depending on word class.



Vocabulary: collocation

Matching two halves

- art, successful, olive, upset, board, social, take, chicken, low, share
- companies exhibition
- oil risks
- your stomach media
- game your experience
- sales wings

Categorizing

noun + noun

adj + noun

verb + noun

Extension: Remove original text. Ls describe the text, using e.g. 5 of the collocations



Vocabulary: 3 ideas

3 Verb patterns (word grammar): learners transform (without the text)

- 1 It was too complicated so they had low sales. It **RESULTED** (B1+)
- 2 Visitors can share their failures. **Visitors are ENCOURAGED** ... (B2)
- 3 The idea came from Sweden. **The idea ORIGINATED** (B2)
- 4 Guttman says people feel this fear because of social media. **She BLAMES** (B1)



Then learners return to the original / use a dictionary to check verb patterns - a very common problem at B1 level.

If necessary, just make up the sentences, based on the text content.



Pronunciation: 3 ideas

1 Word stress: marking or categorizing

exhibition, successful, product, social media, upset, invention, disgusting, ashamed, inspire, produce, organise

O o	o O	O o o	o O o	O o o o	o o O o
	INSPIRE				

Extension: get Is to come up with some rules, e.g. nouns ending in 'ion'/ 2-syllable verbs/suffix endings



Pronunciation: 3 ideas

2 Linking phrases: Connected speech C + V / intrusive sounds

Pre stage in pairs – think of the questions for 3 of the below.

Pron focus: say these in pairs. What happens between the words in blue?

art exhibition

a coffee mixed with olive oil

resulted in low sales

share their experience

the goal of the exhibition

learn important lessons

inspire open conversation

ashamed about their failure



Pronunciation: 3 ideas

3 Locate the tonic syllable in each intonational phrase

// The Museum of Failure exhibition //
// first opened in 2017//
// in Sweden.//
// It displays the failed products //
//and inventions //
// of successful companies from around the world //
// but mainly from the US.//



And at the level of discourse

Moving away from a discrete item to a holistic approach





Discourse: 4 ideas

TASK: Listen and find out more about jackfruit.
What's so good about it?



<https://resources.sensationsenglish.com/video/8hxsro/3>



Video: jackfruit

[Click here to watch the video](#)



Discourse: 4 ideas

1 Translate a chunk – do this post comprehension tasks



<https://resources.sensationsenglish.com/video/8hxsro/3>



Superfood jackfruit in demand *B1+*

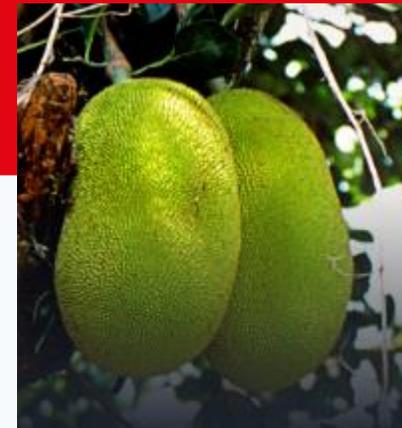
- Green and spiky with a strong sweet smell, jackfruit has become the latest superfood.
- It's been part of the South Asian diet for centuries. It grows so abundantly that tonnes of it would go to waste every year.
- But now India, the world's biggest producer of jackfruit, is cashing in on its popularity. Jackfruit is a superfood meat alternative.
- Chefs love it for its versatility. When ripe it can be used to make cakes, juices, ice cream and crisps. When unripe it can be added to curries, fried, minced or sautéed.

TASK: Have a go! Translate the first two bullet points into your L1/another language. Keep it as close to the original as you can. Don't miss out info.





Discourse: 1 Translation



STEP ONE Translate a chunk individually/in pairs (differentiate re length/part of the text)

STEP TWO Compare their version with peers. T monitors. Put anything of interest on the board if a monolingual classroom

STEP THREE Remove the original text

STEP FOUR Learners rewrite in **English** alone/in pairs

STEP FIVE Compare with the original

STEP SIX Discuss alternatives



Discourse 2: text rebuilding

2 Text rebuilding from prompts, post comprehension tasks ...





Discourse: 2 Text rebuilding

Teacher provides PROMPTS of main CONTENT words – nouns, verbs, adjectives, key adverbials. *Use dashes, arrows etc*



- Jackfruit - strong sweet smell – latest superfood.
- South Asian diet centuries. Grows abundantly – tonnes waste every year.
- India - biggest producer of jackfruit – cashing in. Superfood meat alternative.
- Chefs love - versatility. Ripe - cakes, juices, ice cream, crisps. When Unripe - curries, fried, minced. West - burgers, tacos, cutlets.



Discourse: 2 Text rebuilding

Learners then work alone or in pairs to reconstruct the text.
Rather similar to the oral-written DICTOLOSS technique.

TASK: Have a go!





Discourse 2: Text rebuilding example

ORIGINAL B1+

- Green and spiky with a strong sweet smell, jackfruit has become the latest superfood.
- It's been part of the South Asian diet for centuries. It grows so abundantly that tonnes of it would go to waste every year.
- But now India, the world's biggest producer of jackfruit, is cashing in on its popularity. Jackfruit is a superfood meat alternative.
- Chefs love it for its versatility. When ripe it can be used to make cakes, juices, ice cream and crisps. When unripe it can be added to curries, fried, minced or sautéed. In the West, it's used for burgers, tacos and even cutlets.

ONE STUDENT'S VERSION

- **Jackfruit, which has a strong sweet smell and are green and spiky, is attracting interest as the latest superfood.**
- **Jackfruit has been used in the diet of South Asian countries for centuries. However, it grows abundantly, so tonnes of jackfruit are wasted every year.**
- **Now, India has become the biggest producer of jackfruit and it is cashing in. The fruit is a meat alternative, as well as (being) a superfood.**
- **Chefs love jackfruit because it is very versatile. When it is ripe, it can be used for cakes, juices, ice cream and crisps. Even if it is unripe, it can be used in curries, fried or minced. In Western countries (cuisine), jackfruit is made into burgers, tacos or cutlets.**



Discourse:

3 Text deconstruction ↪ reconstruction





Discourse:

3 Text deconstruction ↪ reconstruction

Around 2,000 artefacts were stolen from the British Museum leading many to question the effectiveness of museum security systems. A staff member's been fired in relation to the disappearances, and the museum director's resigned for mishandling the situation.

Founded in 1753, the British Museum possesses around 8 million pieces but only around 80 thousand are on display. The rest are in storage, accessible only to staff and occasionally academics doing research.

B2



Discourse:

3 Text deconstruction → reconstruction

As always, initially ensure learners comprehend the overall text

- What happened at the BM?
- Why were so many items in storage?
- Why did it happen?
- Were there good security measures?
- Who is Gradel? What did he send to the BM?
- Does he think there's a good chance the items will be returned?





Discourse:

3 Text deconstruction ↪ reconstruction

Learners look at each sentence and break it into separate facts

- **EXAMPLE Sentence 1** *Around 2,000 artefacts were stolen from the British Museum, leading many to question the effectiveness of museum security systems.*

- 1 Some artefacts were stolen
- 2 They were taken from the British Museum
- 3 There were about 2000 pieces
- 4 Now people have questions
- 5 They're asking if the security systems are any good.



Discourse:

3 Text deconstruction ↪ reconstruction

Learners look at each sentence. They break it into as many separate facts as possible.

- **Sentence 2**

A staff member's been fired in relation to the disappearances, and the museum director's resigned for mishandling the situation

- 1 One person was fired
- 2 He/she was a member of staff
- 3 Important objects had disappeared
- 4 The museum director resigned
- 5 He mishandled the situation



Deconstruction, before reconstruction

- **Sentence 3 & 4**

Founded in 1753, the British Museum possesses around 8 million pieces but only around 80 thousand are on display. The rest are in storage, accessible only to staff and occasionally academics doing research.

- **TASK:** You have a go!



The key stage: rebuilding

- The challenge: building it back up again ...





Discourse 3: Text deconstruction

↳ reconstruction

ORIGINAL B2

- Around 2,000 artefacts were stolen from the British Museum, leading many to question the effectiveness of museum security systems
- A staff member's been fired in relation to the disappearances, and the museum director's resigned for mishandling the situation.

STUDENT'S VERSION (Brazilian)

- **Approximately 2000 pieces have been taken from the British Museum, and now people are asking if the security systems are effective.**
- **A member of staff was fired regarding the disappearance of the important objects, and the museum director resigned for mishandling the situation.**



Discourse 3: Text deconstruction

↳ reconstruction

ORIGINAL B1+

- The British Museum is missing over 2,000 artefacts which have been stolen. With this incident, several members of staff have been fired and many people are questioning the museum's security systems.
- The museum was constructed in 1753 and is home to 8 million artefacts. However, only 80 thousand are on display while the rest are in storage with limited access to staff and academic researchers

STUDENT'S VERSION (Japanese)

- At the BM, over 2000 artefacts are missing which **(are believed to)** have been stolen.
- Several members were/have been fired and it makes/has made people wonder about the security systems.
- The BM was built in 1753 and it has 8 million artefacts.
- **The BM, which was constructed in 1753, has 8 million artefacts.**
- **The BM, constructed in 1753, has 8 million artefacts**
- Since **(only)** 80,000 objects are displayed, the others are in the archives, which have limited access to staff and academic researchers.



Procedural stages in the classroom

STAGE 1

ON A WORKSHEET/THE BOARD/IWB/SCREEN

- The British Museum is missing over 2,000 artefacts which have been stolen.
- However, archaeologist Dan Hicks blames the museum for the thefts as he revealed that not all the artefacts there were documented.

STAGE 2

LS BREAK THE SENTENCES DOWN, INDIVIDUALLY OR IDEALLY COLLABORATIVELY

- 1 This happened at the BM
- 2 Over 2000 artefacts are missing.
- 3 They were stolen.

- 1 Dan Hicks is an archaeologist.
- 2 He blames the museum.
- 3 Not all of the artefacts were documented.

STAGE 3 Remove original. Collaborative reconstruction



Why are these tasks worthwhile?

These de/reconstruction tasks are valid as:

- The texts are **content-rich**. The content is also understood/contextualised, so the focus shifts – **lessens the cognitive load**.
- It is a way of **consolidating** reading, and **deepening understanding**, by **converting** it to a different skill.
- It **stretches** learners **beyond merely noticing**, to **production**, thereby pushing them to the next level.
- It is **collaborative** – learners discuss alternatives and give reasons (L1 possible here).
- Processing of the language is maximised – both **decoding and encoding** are involved. Ls are required to **process multiple aspects** as it's **holistic**.
- The tasks provide opportunities for **emerging language** + for **scaffolding** (T or peers), thereby stretching them.
- Learners find them both **motivating** and **challenging**
- **These tasks aren't in coursebooks – they're unwieldy.**





Tips and considerations on text reconstruction ideas

- Provide an initial text which is a little below their receptive level
- State the minimum length learners should tackle – anything over is a bonus
- Provide very clear examples of tasks. With the building (prompts) task, provide all the content words – if insufficient function words, exclude that sentence
- Present these reconstructions tasks as a **challenge** / **puzzle**!
- Stress that the aim is NOT to get exactly the same as the original
- Take your role (as monitor/guide) seriously + manage the plenary with care, e.g. select 2 learner examples – highlight and discuss differences / choices
- Use for B1 Pre level upwards (to C2)



And some extra thoughts ...

- These tasks are unlikely to work with young children due to the nature of the tasks and the metacognitive demands.
- Don't overuse! As with most task types, they can lose their sparkle!
- Bear in mind that for you, it's a great way to assess a learner's overall level, if done independently: it's holistic + the same text for all, making comparisons simple.



Discourse 4:

Focus on an appropriate area for learners

Select one area of particular value to **YOUR** learners.

Reapproach the whole text post comprehension. Simply use a GAP FILL.

Typical areas for work might include:

Collocations

Verb patterns

Prepositions/conjunctions

Tenses

Suffixes: prefixes
and affixes

Passives



Example: prepositions



Around 2,000 artefacts were stolen _____ the British Museum leading many to question the effectiveness _____ museum security systems. A staff member's been fired _____ relation _____ the disappearances, and the museum director's resigned _____ mishandling the situation.

Founded _____ 1753, the British Museum possesses around 8 million pieces but only around 80 thousand are _____ display. The rest are _____ storage, accessible only _____ staff and occasionally academics doing research.

Archaeologist Dan Hicks blamed the British Museum _____ not recording their entire collection, which makes uncatalogued pieces difficult to track and recover. The museum also lacked electronic sensors, CCTV _____ all entrances and swipe cards recording when staff access items.



Theoretical background

Declarative and procedural knowledge

Emergent language and scaffolding/recasting

Acquisition vs learning – the “interface position”

Input vs output – the value of the latter

Processing grammar – noticing, structuring (input to intake) and proceduralizing

Structural vs process syllabuses



To sum up ...

- In this session we have
- Reflected briefly on the lasting power of structural approaches to language teaching/learning
- Looked at some obvious differences in reading texts between B1 (pre) and B1+
- Worked through some examples of word level, then sentence-level activities to exploit texts
- Spent time looking at some effective holistic activities and how to implement them
- Reflected on why these discourse level tasks are beneficial



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