

Guidelines 1 (1975)

## Communicating Through the Ordering Exercise

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### The ordering exercise

In an ordering exercise the learners have information which is in the wrong order and which must be put in the correct order. The simplest type of ordering exercise is one where the learners are given a set of words in random order:

*stored position a should tanks in be vertical*  
which they must rearrange to make a sensible sentence. Ordering exercises, like any other exercise type (see Nation 1976), can be used to give practice in communication.

There are two main types of ordering exercises. In one type the information itself contains all the clues which are needed to put the information in the correct order. Thus in the example given above the most likely order is

*Tanks should be stored in a vertical position.*

To encourage oral communication, the information is distributed among the learners. In the other type of ordering exercise, a suitable order is only a matter of opinion, or is correct because it agrees with someone else's opinion. Such communication exercises are sometimes called 'ranking' exercises. Let us look at how each of these types can give practice in communicating.

### Ordering exercises with distributed information

If the information used in an ordering exercise is distributed amongst the learners, then communication between the learners becomes essential. The strip story (Gibson 1975) is an excellent example of this. In this exercise the class is divided into groups of about twelve people, although we have used the exercise successfully with one group of eighteen. Each person in the group has a different sentence from a story. Usually one learner has one sentence. In order to make the number of people in each group match the number of sentences in the story however, it is sometimes necessary to give two short sentences to one person or to divide a long sentence between two people. What is important is that each learner in the group has a different sentence from the other learners. Each learner memorizes his sentence and returns the strip of paper containing it to the teacher. Then the learners tell each other their sentences. By discussing the sentences, the

learners try to put them in order to make a story. No writing is allowed and the teacher takes no part in the activity. Here is an example of a passage which is divided up for groups of eleven to sixteen learners. It is taken from *Elementary Stories for Reproduction 2* by L.A. Hill.

Jack was a young sailor./ He lived in England, but was often away with his ship./ One summer he came back from a long voyage/ and found new neighbours near his mother's house./ They had a pretty daughter./ and Jack soon loved her very much./ He said to her, 'My next voyage will begin in a few days' time, Gloria./ I love you and I'll marry you when I come back./ I'll think about you all the time, and I'll write to you/ and send you a present from every port./ Jack's first port was Freetown in Africa./ and he sent Gloria a parrot from there./ It spoke five languages./ When Jack's ship reached Australia, there was a letter from Gloria./ It said, 'Thank you for the parrot, Jack./ It tasted much better than a chicken./'

Instead of sentences, pictures can be used. This increases the amount of communication required because the learners need to describe their pictures in addition to discussing in what order they occur. Many Sunday newspapers have comic strips like *Blondie*, *The Born Loser*, and *The Little Woman* which have a strong story line. The teacher cuts the story up and puts each picture on a card. *Blondie* has twelve pictures so it can be used in groups of up to twelve people. The learners describe their pictures to each other, making sure that no one else can see their picture. The learners can question each other about the content of the pictures. They then decide in what order the pictures should be and eventually reach agreement about that. If they wish, the learners can change seats so that the order in which they sit in the circle corresponds to what they think is the correct order of the pictures. This exercise is very easy for a teacher to prepare and ensures anything from 20 to 50 minutes of vigorous communication.

Ordering exercises can be done in pairs. Some comic strips contain only four pictures. Each learner in a pair has two pictures and by describing their pictures the learners decide on the correct order. When one pair have finished they can exchange pictures with another pair and work on those. Instead of pictures, short jokes or dialogues can be broken up and used.

### Ranking exercises

In the ordering exercises described above the material has a correct order which most people would agree with. For example, if the sentences of the joke about the parrot are put in the wrong order it is no longer a joke and does not make sense. In the following ordering exercises, the material does not have a discoverable

order. The ordering depends on opinion, belief, and guesswork. These exercises are sometimes called ranking exercises. Here is an example:

#### Visiting Thailand

You are a government official. A group of important visitors is coming to Thailand next week. They will be here for a week. You have an unlimited budget so transport is not a problem. You want these people to have a clear impression of Thailand and its people. Which places will you take them to?

Choose six places from the list given below and put them in order of importance. You may add no more than two places not on the list to make up your total of six. Remember, the places should be in order of importance which is not necessarily the same as the order in which you would visit them.

- Monasteries in Bangkok
- Chiang Mai
- The floating market
- A Thai country village and rice-fields
- A small provincial town
- The shopping area in Bangkok
- Songkhla
- Phuket and Phang-nga
- Pattaya and Island trip
- The Rose Garden
- A rubber plantation
- Klong Toey and the port
- The Ancient City
- The crocodile farm
- Khao Yai
- River trip to Bang-Pa-In and Ayuthya
- Train trip to River Kwai and waterfall
- Sunday Market
- Patpong at night

Using ranking exercises:

The work is done in three steps.

Step 1. Each learner reads his information sheet and individually chooses six places and ranks them. This should take about five minutes and certainly not longer than ten minutes. The teacher can give necessary explanation and can answer questions at this stage. This first step is very important because it ensures that each learner has a point of view to argue from.

Step 2. The learners form small groups of 3 to 4 people and decide on the six places and the ranking of those six.

The members of each group try to agree on the choice and ranking so that each group has one agreed list. Voting is not allowed, but arguing and explaining are — in English! This step should not take too long as at least 30 minutes are needed for step 3.

#### Step 3.

Now the whole class gathers as one group to try to reach agreement on the six places and their order. If the class is small, say fifteen people or less, then everybody sits in a circle and argues and explains. In a larger class, the fishbowl technique can be used. In this technique each small group selects one representative. The representatives of the groups sit in a small inner circle facing each other. This inner group must reach an agreement on behalf of the whole class. The other members of the class stand behind their representatives and follow the discussion. If a member of the class does not like the way his representative is arguing, he can tap his representative on the shoulder and take his place in the inner discussion. The representative in the inner circle must surrender his seat if someone taps him on the shoulder. The listeners in the outer circle should not be afraid to tap their representative on the shoulder and take his place. It keeps the discussion interesting and fast moving. There should be two extra chairs in the inner circle for class members who are not representatives to contribute to the inner circle discussion. But they also obey the 'shoulder tap' rule.

The teacher's job is to explain the three steps to the learners, organize them into groups, and tell them how much time they have left. It is best if the teacher does not take any part in the discussion or else the learners will always look to the teacher for decisions and will not speak so much.

There are a wide variety of possible ranking exercises. Two of the better known ones follow:

(1) Fallout shelter: people: Radioactive fallout will reach your area in 20 minutes. There is a shelter where you will be safe but it can only take six people. Select six from the list of ten given below and rank in order of priority.

- a storekeeper, 31 years old
- his wife, 6 months pregnant
- a radical anti-government student, male
- a famous author, female, aged 41
- a famous female filmstar, aged 28
- an expert in biochemistry, male, aged 54
- a priest, 34
- an Olympic athlete

a female second-year university student,  
studying history and literature  
a policeman, who refuses to surrender  
his gun

- (2) Fight for survival: Your helicopter has crashed near a remote island and you are the only survivor. You must travel several days on foot through mountainous jungle to reach the other end of the island where there is the only village on the island. Twenty items from the helicopter have been washed up on the beach around you. You must choose ten items which you think will be useful on your walk across the island. Put these ten items in order of importance for your survival.

The items:

a canvas shoulder bag	a pair of scissors, 6" long
a pair of gumboots	a small pistol with 6 bullets
a woollen blanket	half a bottle of whisky
a bandage 2" x 10'	half a box of ordinary matches
a straw hat	a small hand mirror
a cowboy hat	a pair of leather sandals
a wristwatch	a ball of string, 20' long
a note pad	a plastic bag, 2' x 3'
a pocket knife with 2 blades	a transistor radio with new batteries
a coil of thin wire, 10' long	binoculars in a leather case

Here are some other ranking exercises:

- (1) Qualities of a good teacher: Rank the following qualities in order of importance.

He tries to find out what the students want and what they like doing.

His students feel free to discuss most things with him without fear or hesitation.

His classroom activities show that he thinks it is important for students to learn to work together and understand each other.

He keeps up to date with his subject matter.

He wears nice clothes and is always neat and tidy.

His classes are well disciplined and orderly.

Other teachers think that he is a valuable colleague. He is helpful, co-operative and stimulating to work with.

He sets high standards of academic achievement. He does not accept careless and untidy work.

He openly admits his mistakes to his students.

He lets the students decide on their timetable and arrangement of work.

He uses many different teaching techniques to make his lessons interesting.

- (2) Films: About ten advertisements for film shows are cut out of the newspaper and the learners rank them in order of preference from the film they would most like to see, to the least preferred.

- (3) Novels: Each learner very briefly describes a graded reader or novel he has read in English and then gives his opinion of it. The class then rank the novels in order of interest. In this exercise one learner is the only source of information about the novel if the others have not read it. (If others have then they try to agree.) Thus the others must listen carefully to his description in order to be able to agree on a ranking. This is also an excellent way of getting learners interested in doing more extensive reading.

Some ranking exercises do have a correct answer. Here is an example.

#### Stress

Our lives are full of change. We change our living places more frequently; we change jobs; we hurry about all day long. All these changes — both good and bad — cause stress. The more stress we experience, the more likely we are to suffer some ill-health because of it.

Here is a list of happenings and changes that commonly occur in people's lives. Some of these happenings and changes cause more stress than others. Put the twelve following happenings and changes in order from the one you think causes the most stress to the one you think causes the least stress.

When you finish the exercise you can compare your ordering with that given by a group of psychologists.

Change in health of family member  
Marriage  
Death of a close friend  
Jail term  
Fired at work  
Divorce  
Personal injury or illness  
Death of spouse  
Sex difficulties  
Change in financial state

You must think not particularly about yourself and your own situation, but should think of people in general.

The psychologists' ranking is, from most stressful to least stressful:

Death of spouse, divorce, jail term, personal injury or illness, marriage, fired at work, change in health of family member, sex difficulties, change in financial state, death of a close friend.

Other ranking exercises can be found in Thomas (1978).

#### Communication and errors

There are two ways to practise spoken communication. In a controlled approach the teacher guides what the learners say by careful preparation and controlled situations. This limits the amount of speaking that is done but also reduces the possibility of error. The learner can also control his speaking by speaking slowly and carefully in order to avoid errors. In an approach stressing the immediacy of communication, there is a large amount of speaking, but there is similarly a large number of grammatical errors. The urgency of the communication task removes the possibility and desirability of control. Successful communication of ideas is given priority over grammatical control.

These two ways of practising spoken communication both have desirable aims, grammatical correctness and efficiency in communication, and it may happen that learners can eventually communicate efficiently with grammatical accuracy. The speaking exercises described in this article aim at efficiency in communication. The teacher should not attempt much grammatical preparation for them and should not repeatedly correct learners who make grammatical errors during the exercises. However, there should be other opportunities during the English course where learners speak carefully with concern for correctness and with any necessary correction from the teacher. We need to make sure that learners practise both ways of speaking during an English course.

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