

How to teach dialogues using a sentence-unscrambling task as a pre-speaking task

Issue 1: What novice teachers often do

Either the teacher reads and translates the dialogue or the teacher has the students read and translate the dialogue.

- Dialogues are not for translation. Dialogues are for listening and speaking activities. Somehow, novice teachers treat a dialogue as a reading passage. This would cause the learners to miss out on opportunities to practice listening and speaking skills to the fullest.

Issue 2: Another pitfall of novice teachers

Sometimes, novice teachers ask students to read a dialogue out loud in class, and then they immediately ask comprehension questions.

- Reading out loud tends to draw a learners attention away from meaning and more towards decoding words and pronunciation. Thus, asking them to focus on meaning after reading out loud is not advisable.

Issue 3: What novice teachers don't do

- Since the dialogue sounds easy, they do not double-check the students' comprehension of the dialogue.
- Dialogues look easier compared to reading passages, but there can be rich language-related information.

Why sentence unscrambling tasks?

An unscrambling task:

- enables students to focus on the words, sentences, and the structure of the dialogue simultaneously.
- produces more meaningful interaction between learners when it is done in pairs or groups.
- motivates students to finish the task successfully due to its game-element.
- can prepare low-level learners with proper vocabulary and grammar to deal with the following more challenging tasks such as role-play.
- is easy to prepare on the part of the teacher.