

Role-play

Definition: a type of instruction aimed at providing learners with opportunities to communicate naturally (Ellis, 1997, p. 108)

Novice teachers sometimes think that having students read out loud different parts of a pre-written dialogue is a role-play. However, this is not a true role-play as there is no language being spontaneously created. Thinking about a role-play as practice for the real world, where there is no script, is one way to understand this need for spontaneous language production.

Some points to remember about role-play

1. Role-play became a popular activity in the 1970s in the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) movement.
2. From the social-interactive point of view, role-play has important values in promoting spontaneous language use and increasing motivation.
3. In a second language learning situation (where students live where the target language is spoken), role-play can be followed up with reality-based tasks. (ie, practice ordering food at a restaurant in class in a role-play, then actually go out and do it.)
4. Role plays often demand acting skills and therefore may conflict with the learners' desire for realism. If the role the student is asked to assume is far from his or her reality, then the activity loses effectiveness.

Questions the teacher should ask when designing a role-play activity

1. Is the situation in the role-play is realistic enough to make learners feel as real participants in the situation rather than as mere learners?
2. Are the roles relevant, fun, and appealing to the learners emotionally and linguistically?

3. Do learners have the necessary information to carry out the activity?
(Context, role descriptions, cultural, and linguistic information.)
4. Will students act the role-play out in front of the class? If so, should the audience provide feedback about their classmates' role-play instead of just watching, feeling bored?

What teachers can do during role-play

1. help the activity to progress by offering suggestions supportively when learners get seriously lost.
2. play a *role* themselves as a covert prompter: they can provide new linguistic information and keep the role-play flow.
3. provide helpful and gentle linguistic correction to get participants out of difficult misunderstandings and hesitations.
4. keep the audience, if there is one, engaged in the role-play as much as the participants by encouraging them to provide feedback about the role-play.

Role-play Example:

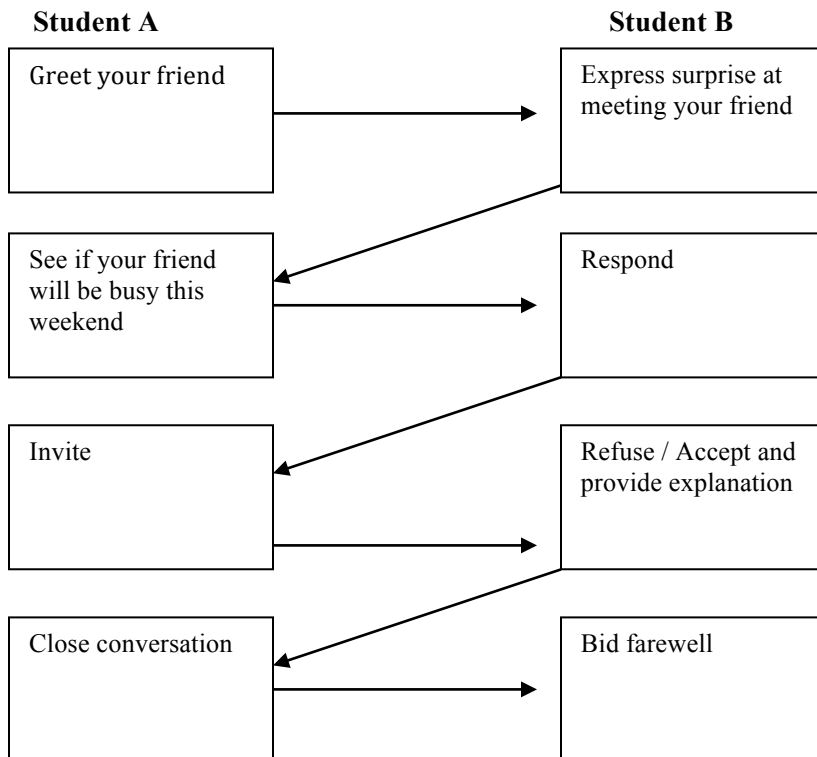
Preparation/background: Students have already looked at and studied linguistic information from a pre-written dialogue(s) related to topic of invitations, acceptances, and refusals.

Student directions:

Context: Two university students are grocery shopping and run into each other by chance. One of the students invites the other one to a party.

Student A: You are grocery shopping and see a friend that is in a few of your classes. You go greet your friend because you want to invite him or her to a small party that you are having next weekend with some classmates.

Student B: You are grocery shopping and see a friend from a few classes. Your friend comes over to invite you to a party, but you really don't want to go.



For more practice, repeat and switch roles and/or accept the invitation instead of declining it.

References

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