Introduction to Task-Based Language Teaching

Handouts

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Task definitions:

Definition #1:

"A task is a piece of work undertaken for oneself or for others, freely or for some reward. Thus, examples of tasks include painting a fence, dressing a child, filling out a form, buying a pair of shoes, making an airline reservation, borrowing a library book, taking a driving test, typing a letter, weighing a patient, sorting letters, taking a hotel reservation, writing a check, finding a street destination, and helping someone across a road. In other words, by "task" is meant the hundred and one things people do in everyday life, at work, at play, and in between. "Tasks" are the things people will tell you they do if you ask them and they are not applied linguists."

(Long, 1985, p.89, cited in Nunan, 2004, p.2)

Definition #2:

"[A task is] a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing, or interacting in the target language while their attention is focused on mobilizing their grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning, and in which the intention is to convey meaning rather than to manipulate form. The task should also have a sense of completeness, being able to stand alone as a communicative act in its own right."

(Nunan, 2004, p.4)

Three criteria based on definitions by Nunan and Ellis (in Gnida, 2012, p.122):

- "A task is a pedagogical activity in which learners...
  use language to accomplish a clearly specified objective or outcome. That is, as is common in the real world, language is used to meet a non-linguistic and somewhat authentic goal."

- "A task is a pedagogical activity in which learners...
  focus on meaning as they interact with language. That is, although learners may give some attention to form, their primary attention is to convey or comprehend meaning rather than to manipulate language."

- "A task is a pedagogical activity in which learners...**use their own resources** (language, ideas) and the content they access through language (as they listen, view, read, discuss, interview) to solve problems, convince, teach, design a poster, fill in a form, write an email, etc. That is, although some tasks will likely elicit certain linguistic forms, what learners **say** and **the language they use is not specified.**"

Activity: Communicative Tasks and Non-Tasks

Using these characteristics of a communicative task, decide on the nature of the following activities: task or non-task. Use the checklist to rate activity.

Characteristics of communicative tasks:
1. Is meaning the focus of the task?
2. Are learners involved in creating their own meaning?
3. Does the activity relate to the real world?
4. Is there a deadline on the completion of the task?
5. What outcome is expected in the assessment?

Scenarios	Task	Non-Task
1. **Benchmark 3** Listen and respond to an apology from a classmate who took your pen from your desk.		
2. **Benchmark 4** Memorize this list of words for your vocabulary quiz on Friday.		
3. **Benchmark 5** Write a formal letter to an insurance company to cancel or change an insurance policy and to request a refund, and submit your letter to your teacher for feedback.		
4. **Benchmark 3** Practise these grammatical rules for noun and verb agreement.		
5. **Benchmark 5** Read these instructions about how to get rid of bedbugs in the home. Answer the questions that follow.		
6. **Benchmark 4** Listen to an exchange between a sales clerk and a customer.		
7. **Benchmark 3** Give short directions to the location of your school to a friend who is planning to meet you there. Use at least three imperatives (e.g., turn right at, etc.).		

Characteristics of TBLT

Examine the characteristics of TBLT below, and discuss the following questions:

- Which of these are most characteristic of how you teach? Explain.

- Which are less characteristic of how you teach? Explain.

- How might they look in a class? How difficult would it be to adjust your teaching style to incorporate some of these characteristics? (Minor tweaks? Major upheaval?)

- Tasks are **clearly defined**.

- Instructions and **criteria** for success are clearly specified.

- Communication is **genuine**; language is used to fill in real information or meaning gaps.

- Learners **use own resources** and the **content** they access through language (as they listen, view, read, discuss, interview) **to *do* things** that are meaningful (i.e., to complete tasks: solve a problem, design a poster, write a report, complete a form, teach a client, convince a classmate, prioritize a list, make a decision, etc.).

- Focus on form, and strategies and skills, are contextualized within a task: **prior** to a task to enable students to accomplish the task, **during** the task to facilitate the task, or **after** the task based on issues that arose.

- Skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) are integrated as they are in real life (i.e., learners will likely need to make use of more than one skill to accomplish a task).

- Learners self-correct and give each other feedback; receive formative feedback; have the opportunity to "try it again."

Note: The characteristics above are drawn primarily from Ellis (2003, 2009), excerpted from Gnida, (2012).

Principles of TBLT

Principle	Evidence of this in the lesson examined
Scaffolding	
Task dependency	
Recycling	
Active learning	
Integration of form and function	
Reproduction to creation	
Reflection on learning	

Basement Suite/Ikea: Series of tasks/activities:[1]

Real-world task: Furnish a basement suite to rent out (budget: $2000)

Series of Activities:

TASK #1: Learners make a list of items they would need to purchase to furnish a basement suite for renting it out. In groups, they sort items into "necessary" and "nice to have" columns. Together, as a class, come to an agreed upon shopping list of eight items. (See worksheet in LINC 5 curriculum.)

TASK #2: Learners read through Kijiji ads to find options for used furniture for sale. They identify appropriate items for furnishing a rental suite that would fit a particular budget.

TASK #3: During a fieldtrip to Ikea, learners discover the information they need to develop a commercial and make recommendations regarding what to purchase to furnish a rental suite (e.g., items available, pricing, location, sales). They complete a worksheet identifying eight items, their locations, and prices. They complete a self-analysis journal entry related to their trip.

Enabling activities:

- Learners brainstorm for ways to catch attention and introduce the topic *("Excuse me, I'm looking for...")*.

- Learners practise checking comprehension through summarizing and repeating in short, guided communication activities.

- In groups, learners decide which thanking conventions would be most appropriate in this setting, and then practise the intonation (to sound sincere).

- Learners complete vocabulary exercises presenting key items related to furniture and furniture descriptions, and then refine their pronunciation of the new terms (related to problem sounds or word stress).

- Learners review how to form questions, especially the use of modals in polite questions. For example, rather than a bald, *"Where are the beds?"* learners could practise forms such as, *"Where could I find the beds?"* or *"Could you tell me where to find the beds?"* They practise the linking, stress, and intonation of the questions.

- Given a grocery store floorplan (or their own knowledge of a supermarket), learners mingle, asking each other where to find certain items using the questions practised.

TASK #4: In groups, learners plan a short commercial featuring one of the items chosen (see LINC 5, p.55). **Enabling activities?**

TASK #5: Learners present the commercial to the class (see Rubric, p.56); Learners take notes on commercials. **Enabling activities?**

TASK #6: Learners use information gleaned from the fieldtrip and commercials to participate in a small group discussion. They make recommendations, negotiate, and compromise to reach an agreement regarding what to purchase based on a pre-determined budget. **Enabling activities?**

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[1] **Adapted from *LINC 5 curriculum (pp.54-56)* and *S3-21-24* of the *ATESL Curriculum Framework:*** Chambers, W., Gnida, S., Messaros, C., Ilott, W., and Dawson, K. (2011). ATESL Adult ESL Curriculum Framework. ATESL: Edmonton, AB.

# Rod Ellis: Ten Principles of Instructed Second Language Acquisition

Full document found at
https://moodle2.unifr.ch/pluginfile.php/166786/mod_resource/content/2/Texte/03d_Ellis_2008_Instructed2ndLangFinalWeb.pdf

| Rod Ellis' principles of instructed SLA:	How is TBLT compatible with each principle?
Principle 1: "Instruction needs to ensure that learners develop both a rich repertoire of formulaic expressions and a rule-based competence."	
Principle 2: "Instruction needs to ensure that learners focus predominantly on meaning."	
Principle 3: "Instruction needs to ensure that learners also focus on form."	
Principle 4: "Instruction needs to focus on developing implicit knowledge of the second language while not neglecting explicit knowledge."	
Principle 5: "Instruction needs to take into account the learner's built-in syllabus."	
Principle 6: "Successful instructed language learning requires extensive second language input."	
Principle 7: "Successful instructed language learning also requires opportunities for output."	
Principle 8: "The opportunity to interact in the second language is central to developing second language proficiency."	
Principle 9: "Instruction needs to take account of individual differences in learners."	
Principle 10: "In assessing learners' second language proficiency, it is important to examine free as well as controlled production."	

TBLT Task Framework Chart

Real-World/Target Tasks
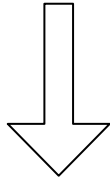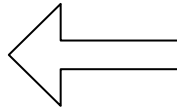
Pedagogical Tasks   **Enabling Skills**

Rehearsal Tasks **Activation Tasks**   **Language Exercises** **Communication Activities**

Nunan, D. (1999). *Second language teaching and learning*. Boston: Heinle/Thomson Learning. Reproduced under Work Available Through the Internet exception of the Copyright Act, RSC 1985, c. C-42, s.30.04.

Pedagogical Task: Rehearsal task

Sample:

Your family is house- or car-shopping. Write a paragraph in the form of a Kijiji ad, describing your family's must-haves in a home or a car.

Exchange your description with a partner. Now go through a "homes for sale" or "cars for sale" section in a newspaper/magazine/Kijiji and select a home or car you think would suit your partner based on the information provided.

Explain your choice to your partner. Is your partner satisfied with your choice, or would he/she have made a different choice?

Pedagogical Task: Activation task

Sample:

Work with three other students. You are on a ship that is sinking. You have to swim to a nearby island. You have a waterproof container, but **can only carry 20 kilos** of items in it. Decide which of the following items you will take.

Axe (8 kilos)	Box of novels and magazines (3 kilos)
Cans of food (500 grams each)	Packets of sugar, flour, rice, powdered milk, coffee, tea (each packet weighs 500 grams)
Bottles of water (1.5 kilos each)	Medical kit (2 kilos)
Short-wave radio (12 kilos)	Portable CD player and CDs (4 kilos)
Firelighting kits (500 grams each)	Rope (6 kilos)
Notebook computer (3.5 kilos)	Waterproof sheets of fabric (3 kilos each)

(http://www.education.auckland.ac.nz/webdav/site/education/shared/about/centres/lipis/docs/readings/plenary05-nunan-slides.pdf) Reproduced under Work Available Through the Internet exception of the Copyright Act, RSC 1985, c. C-42, s.30.04.

Enabling Skills: Language exercise – lexical focus

Sample:

A. Complete the word map with jobs from the list.

architect	receptionist	company director	flight attendant
supervisor	engineer	salesperson	secretary
professor	sales manager	security guard	word processor

Professionals

Architect
_____

_____

Service occupations

Flight attendant
_____

_____

Management positions

Company director
_____

_____

Office work

Receptionist
_____

_____

B. Add two jobs to each category. Then compare with a partner.

(*Richards 1997: 8*) Reproduced under Work Available Through the Internet exception of the Copyright Act, RSC 1985, c. C-42, s.30.04.

Enabling Skills: Language exercise – grammatical focus

Sample:

Complete the conversation. Then practise with a partner.

- **A.** What .... you ....?
- **B.** I'm a student. I study business.
- **A.** And .... do you .... to school?
- **B.** I .... to Jefferson College.
- **A.** .... do you like your classes?
- **B.** I .... them a lot.

Enabling Skills: Communicative activities

Sample:

Look at the survey chart and add three more items to the list. Now, go around the class and ask questions using the present perfect. Collect as many names as you can to fill in the chart.

Find someone who has . . .	Name
. . . driven a racing car	
. . . played squash	
. . . run a marathon	
. . . had music lessons	
. . . ridden a motorcycle	
. . . flown an airplane	
. . . been scuba diving	
. . . played tennis	

Task Design Principles

Task Demands

- Linguistic complexity (vocabulary, grammar, textual/genre conventions)
- Communicative stress (face-threatening topic, number of people involved; relationships of those involved)
- Cognitive demands (familiarity with topic, memory requirements, processing demands)

Task Structure

- What information is supposed to be extracted from the interaction by the learners?
- What are the relevant subcomponents of the topic?
- What tasks can the learners carry out to explore the subcomponents? (e.g., create lists, fill in charts, etc.)
- What linguistic support do the learners need?

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http://coerll.utexas.edu/methods/modules/speaking/03/principles.php
(*Lee 2000:35-36*) Reproduced under Work Available Through
the Internet exception of the Copyright Act, RSC 1985, c. C-42, s.30.04.

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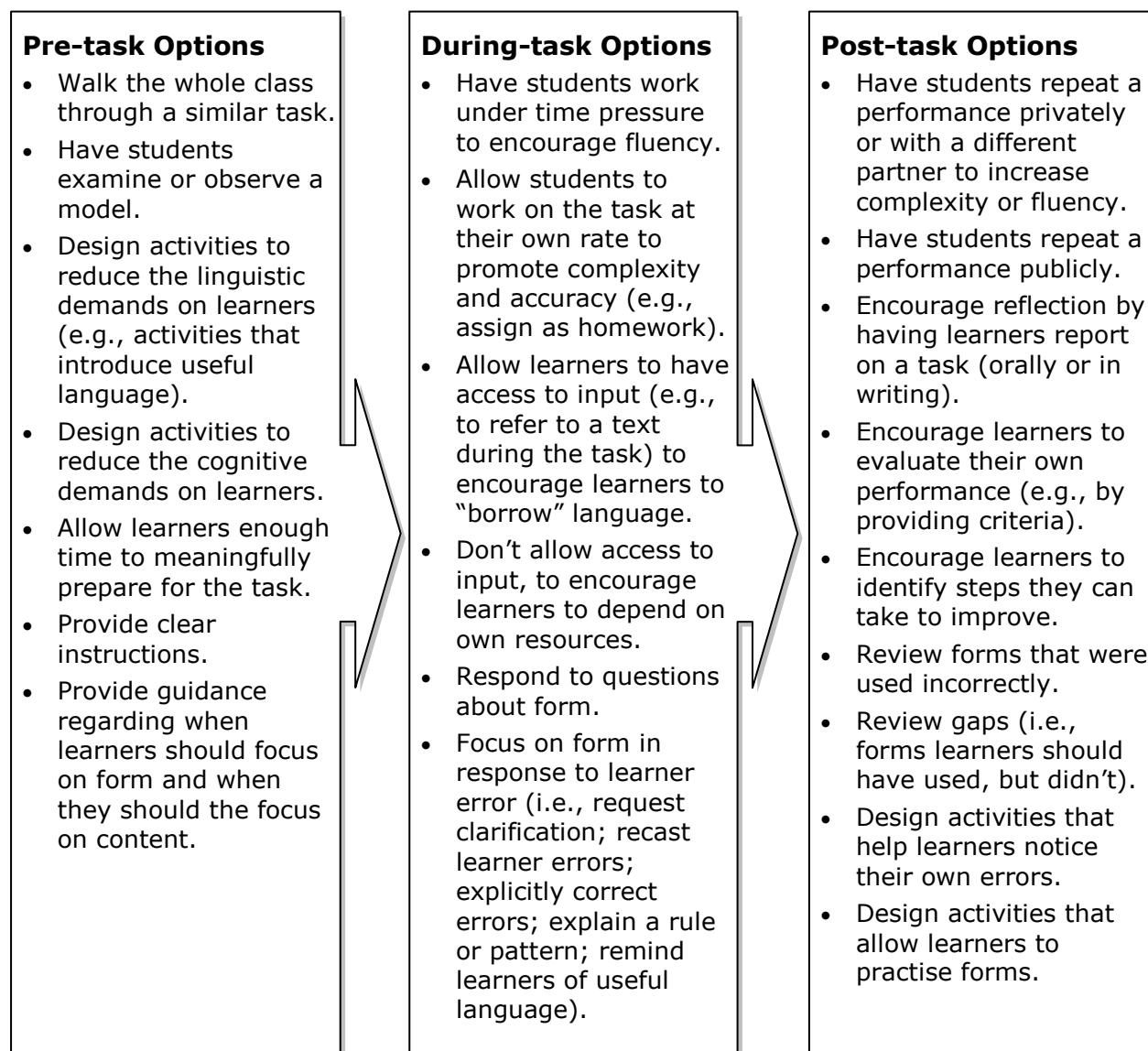## Report an absence role-play task

Health Care Aide	Supervisor
• You work in a group home with handicapped adults. • You were in a minor car accident and injured your _____. You have a doctor's appointment on _____ at _____ and a physiotherapist appointment on ___ at _____. You have trouble _____ (e.g., lifting your arm, standing for a long period of time, lifting weights…) • Call in to work and tell your supervisor about your accident. Be prepared to answer questions about your availability and about what you would or would not be able to do if you came in to work.	• You are the supervisor of _____ who works in a group home. • S/he calls you about her upcoming shifts. • Your goal is to find out if _____ is capable of working the next few shifts, or whether it would be better to find a replacement. Ask him/her questions about the accident, his/her condition and availability, and what tasks s/he is able to do. • Take notes in your logbook below. **Name:** **Problem:** **Availability:** **Plan:**

Designing tasks (adapted from pp. 22–23 of the CLB Support Kit, 2012)

1. Select a task goal, connected in some way to a real-life need or interest of your learners.

   Read a personal email from a friend containing an apology.

2. Relate the task to a CLB skill level and competency.

   Understand simple personal social messages (such as invitations, thanks, apologies, quick updates, and arrangements) within predictable contexts of daily life.

3. Develop a task so that learners can demonstrate what they can do.

   Learners read several short email messages containing an apology and complete short-answer questions to identify main points, relationship of speakers, and specific details.

4. Do a task analysis (i.e., What will learners need to be able to do to successfully perform the task?). Break the task into components. (See the CLB "Indicators of ability" and the CLB "Profile of ability".)

   Get the gist of the message, identifying important details (sender, date, situation, reason for apology).

   ID purpose of text and writer's intent.

   ID words that indicate level of formality and tone.

5. Plan activities that help learners develop the skills and language necessary to accomplish the task.

   Brainstorming for various phrases and words used to apologize (varying levels of formality; intensifiers)

   Using those words and phrases in role-plays (requiring varying levels of formality and regret)

Designing a lesson plan: Ellis' Pre-, During-, and Post-Task phases[2]

Pre-task Options
- Walk the whole class through a similar task.
- Have students examine or observe a model.
- Design activities to reduce the linguistic demands on learners (e.g., activities that introduce useful language).
- Design activities to reduce the cognitive demands on learners.
- Allow learners enough time to meaningfully prepare for the task.
- Provide clear instructions.
- Provide guidance regarding when learners should focus on form and when they should the focus on content.

During-task Options
- Have students work under time pressure to encourage fluency.
- Allow students to work on the task at their own rate to promote complexity and accuracy (e.g., assign as homework).
- Allow learners to have access to input (e.g., to refer to a text during the task) to encourage learners to "borrow" language.
- Don't allow access to input, to encourage learners to depend on own resources.
- Respond to questions about form.
- Focus on form in response to learner error (i.e., request clarification; recast learner errors; explicitly correct errors; explain a rule or pattern; remind learners of useful language).

Post-task Options
- Have students repeat a performance privately or with a different partner to increase complexity or fluency.
- Have students repeat a performance publicly.
- Encourage reflection by having learners report on a task (orally or in writing).
- Encourage learners to evaluate their own performance (e.g., by providing criteria).
- Encourage learners to identify steps they can take to improve.
- Review forms that were used incorrectly.
- Review gaps (i.e., forms learners should have used, but didn't).
- Design activities that help learners notice their own errors.
- Design activities that allow learners to practise forms.

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[2] The visual above is excerpted from Kaskins, Light and Peters (2012, p.67), based on Ellis (2006).

Table 4. Scaffolding for the task "Greet customers, take their orders, and suggest drinks"[3]

Introduce the task; raise awareness	Describe the task. Ask learners what a server would need to do to "greet customers, take their orders, and suggest drinks" successfully. Elicit items such as using appropriate expressions for greeting, small talk, offering to take an order, giving suggestions, showing listenership, and checking comprehension. These items can form a peer-feedback rubric to be used during the final role-play.
Brainstorm for expressions	In groups, have learners brainstorm for common expressions used in restaurants/bars in each of the following categories: initial greetings and comments (*Hi! How are you? Follow me. Not bad. Great*); offers (*Can/could I get you anything to drink? Have you decided on a drink? Can/could I take your order?*); and suggestions (*How about a…? You could try… You might want to try… Maybe a… I really like the…*). Have groups take turns presenting their suggestions. Record the suggestions on the board. Note: If there is room, these suggestions can be left on the board until the role-plays are done.
Grammar lesson	Present a brief grammar lesson or worksheet on the use of modals to make polite offers, and the use of modals and other expressions to make suggestions. Review the verb forms which follow the modals and other expressions. (e.g., *Can/could I* + base verb"; *You could* + base verb; *You might want* + infinitive; *How about* + noun/gerund).
Pronunciation	Model the linking and stress of the various expressions and grammatical constructions. Students practise saying the expressions and sentences fluently with correct stress and linking.
Listening and clarifying information	Quickly read to the class a complex order that a customer might make, and have learners attempt to write down the orders. Ask learners what they would have done in a one-to-one conversation to clarify the order and perhaps slow down a speaker. Elicit ideas such as echoing, asking for clarification, and paraphrasing/summarizing. Write relevant expressions on the board (e.g., *Two orders of fries? Large fries? I'm sorry, I didn't catch that. What was that? OK, let me make sure I've got this right. You'd like…*) Repeat the complex order, this time having learners practise echoing information as they hear it, asking for clarification, and paraphrasing and summarizing at the end. Review nonverbal feedback learners could give to show they have understood. In pairs, one learner gives an order very quickly while the other learner repeats, asks for clarification, paraphrases, and summarizes.

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[3] From ATESL Curriculum Framework: http://www.atesldocuments.com/cf/sequencingTasks

Role play	Hand out menus. In groups of three, have learners role-play taking orders, as both waiter and customer.
Assessment	After each role-play, the "customers" fill in a peer feedback rubric based on the performance indicators above, giving the "waiter" suggestions for improvement. The instructor can also rotate from group to group, providing feedback.
	If desired, the instructor can do the role-play with individual learners, assessing them using a rubric with similar criteria to the one they used for peer feedback.

Activity: Creating a rubric

Choose **one** of the following activities.

A. Plan a feedback rubric, checklist or rating scale for the following task:

Write a description of a lost object to post on a bulletin board.

- Performance indicators:
  - Problem is stated.
  - Key features are described.
  - Organization is logical.
  - Contact information is provided.

1. Look at CLB descriptors for your level. Could the task be simplified to fit (e.g., a more guided writing – perhaps filling in a form)? Do performance indicators or profile of ability provide any useful criteria?
2. Design a rubric to evaluate this task.
3. How could you use these criteria to provide useful feedback to the learner and/or evidence of what the learner can do?

B. Plan a feedback rubric, checklist or rating scale for the following task:

Imagine you have lost your child or an item in the mall. Go to mall security, tell them your problem, and describe your child or lost item in response to questions.

1. Look through the CLB speaking descriptors for your level. Do the performance indicators provide analytical criteria you could use? If this task is too demanding for your level, could you adapt it to be more appropriate?
2. List holistic and analytical criteria for the role of parent or mall security.
3. How could you use these criteria to provide useful feedback to the learner and/or evidence of what the learner can do?

C. Plan a feedback rubric, checklist or rating scale for the following task:

Phone work to request time off due to a minor injury or illness.

1. Look at your CLB level speaking and consider the enabling activities you might have taught prior to the task.
2. List holistic criteria and analytic criteria (for either the employee or the manager).
3. How could you use these criteria to provide useful feedback to the learner and/or evidence of what the learner can do?

D. Plan a feedback rubric, checklist or rating scale for
  the task in the lesson plan you designed earlier:

1. Look through the CLB speaking descriptors for your level. Do the performance indicators provide analytical criteria you could use?
2. List holistic and analytical criteria.
3. How could you use these criteria to provide useful feedback to the learner and/or evidence of what the learner can do?

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