Teaching and Learning in the Language Classroom

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OXFORD
2.2 What are the components of communicative language ability?

2.2.1 Linguistic competence

Linguistic competence is concerned with knowledge of the language itself, its form and meaning. Stern (1983) includes these two aspects in his characterization of what it means to know a language:

The language user knows the rules governing his native language and he can ‘apply’ them without paying attention to them. (Stern 1983: 342)

The native speaker has an intuitive grasp of the linguistic, cognitive, affective and sociocultural meanings expressed by language forms, (ibid.: 343)

Thus linguistic competence involves a knowledge of spelling, pronunciation, vocabulary, word formation, grammatical structure, sentence structure, and linguistic semantics. We can judge, then, that a learner who is able to list orally and in writing the objects in a bowl, such as an apple, an orange, two bananas, and a bunch of grapes, is developing the ability to select specific vocabulary and knows its pronunciation and graphic forms. A learner who can add prefixes correctly to ‘perfect’, ‘legal’, ‘happy’, ‘pleasing’, and ‘audible’ to make the negative equivalents, is developing competence in using word-formation rules correctly. A learner who can describe recent events by using ‘have/has’ and the past participle of the main verb is developing grammatical competence in forming the present perfect tense. In these various ways the learner is acquiring linguistic competence in the second language.

An important point for the teacher to note is that linguistic competence is an integral part of communicative competence. As Faerch, Haastrup, and Phillipson point out: ‘It is impossible to conceive of a person being communicatively competent without being linguistically competent’ (1984: 168). It has perhaps been a misconception about communicative language teaching that it does not aim for a high standard of formal correctness. On the contrary, it is not incompatible to have correctness in the use of rules as an ultimate goal and, at the same time, to tolerate risk-taking and error in the classroom as part of the process of achieving communicative competence.

The role of grammar or formal accuracy has been a major concern in ELT in recent years and teachers need to address a number of issues in designing courses and classroom activities for learners. Acquisition of grammar will probably involve explicit knowledge of grammatical concepts, categories, and rules, and teachers will need to decide which description of these to choose from those available. There is also the question of which procedures for raising awareness of language form and for practising it are most effective: this will be addressed in Chapter 5.

Perhaps the most difficult question to resolve has been how to achieve a balance between ‘focused’ or ‘form-focused’ classroom activities which aim at linguistic accuracy and ‘unfocused’ activities which involve learners in negotiation of meaning and aim at fluency. What might the most appropriate balance of these be in one lesson and to what extent will this be determined by the age, stage of learning, and existing proficiency level of learners? How can these two types of activity be integrated in a lesson or unit of materials? What should the organizing principle be? And how can focused and unfocused activities be balanced and integrated to form a coherent language learning programme over a period of time? These are key issues in ELT and they will be addressed throughout this book.

2.2.2 Pragmatic competence

Pragmatic competence is generally considered to involve two kinds of ability. In part it means knowing how to use language in order to achieve certain communicative goals or intentions. This has also been called illocutionary competence. An example would be ‘It’s so hot today’ This statement could have a number of illocutionary forces. It might be a statement about the physical atmosphere, a request to open the window, or an attempt to elicit the offer of a cold drink.
Methodology now tries to ensure that learners are given realistic presentations of language in use and its communicative intentions, for example, the present progressive might be presented through a dialogue, such as:

**Jack** Hello, Anne, it’s Jack here. Can I speak to Robert, please?

**Anne** Hi, Jack. Robert’s working in the garage at the moment. Can I get him to call you back?

**Jack** Sure. Thanks.

Here is a typical situation in which reference is made to someone’s actions at the time of speaking, one possible use of the present progressive. The presentation embeds the form in a context of use. This is in contrast to the technique many teachers were taught, myself among them, in the days of the structural approach to ELT, that of giving a running commentary while performing actions in the classroom, for example, ‘I’m opening the window’; ‘I’m closing the door’; ‘I’m writing on the blackboard’, and so on. Certainly the latter provided the form and its meaning, but the context of use was less than natural.

The present progressive, of course, has a number of functions, as the following examples demonstrate:

- He’s coming up the steps.
- I’m leaving in five minutes.
- Sally is always complaining.

The first, if said to one burglar by another on lookout at the window of a house, observing the progress of a policem an towards the scene of their crime, could function as a warning. The second, if said by a parent to dawdling children, could be a reprimand. The third might function as criticism. Students will appreciate, through comparison with their first language, that these pragmatic conditions of use are likely to apply in any language. However, in recent years, the functional approach has attempted to show the varying functional use of language forms by using functions rather than structures as their organizing principle. Some coursebooks arrange content in units entitled, for example, ‘Talking about recent events’, ‘Inviting’, or ‘Speculating about the future’. In this way, a particular structure such as the present progressive can be re-visited in units entitled ‘Talking about present actions’ (for example, ‘She’s washing her hair’); ‘Talking about the immediate future’ (for example, ‘They’re moving house tomorrow’), or ‘Describing current situations’ (for example, ‘The Prime Minister is trying to defuse the situation’).

Thus, one element of pragmatic competence is knowing how to perform a particular function or express an intention clearly. In order for communication to be successful, however, spoken or written messages must also be appropriate to the social context in which they are produced. Learners need to know the appropriate social conventions.

If it is the case that one language form can express a variety of functions, the converse is also true. A function can often be expressed in a variety of ways. Take these two responses to a telephone request:

- If you’d kindly wait a moment, I’ll see if he’s able to talk to you.
- Hang on a minute, love, and I’ll get him.

The first is highly formal and polite and might be said, for example, by a young clerk in a chamber of barristers to an elderly peer of the realm. On the other hand, the second is familiar, and might be said informally by one member of the family to another. The message is identical in both cases but the choice of vocabulary and structure depends on the setting, the relative status of the speakers, and their role-relationship. Some contemporary ELT coursebooks attempt to demonstrate this variation in style. For example, in the case of the set of requests presented in Materials extract 2.B, learners are encouraged to think about the conditions under which each phrase might occur. Through such activities learners build awareness of the relationship between language and the context of its use.

It can be seen, then, that social knowledge is necessary to select the language forms to use in different settings, and with people in different roles and with different status. This has also been called sociolinguistic competence (Bachman 1990). It can relate as much to non-verbal as to verbal communication. For example, a person accustomed in their own society to summon a waiter by clicking their fingers would meet with little success in many English-speaking cultures and would probably cause offence. It can also relate to knowing when to speak and when to be silent, or what to say in certain circumstances. Social small talk in some societies, but not in others, might allow guests at a party to ask what other people earn. Part of communicative
1 Polite formulas
Asking for permission is a type of request.
Grade the formulas below.

- not very polite
- polite
- very polite
- extremely polite

.... Could I use your phone?
.... Might I possibly use your phone?
.... Sorry to trouble you, but do you mind if
    I use your phone?
.... Would you mind if I used your phone?
.... May I use your phone?
.... I’ll use your phone, OK?
.... Can I use your phone?
.... I wonder if I could use your phone.

(Viney and Viney: Handshake SB, page 68)

competence in a foreign language is knowing what is appropriate, what is incongruous, and what might
cause offence.

In these ways, the sociolinguistic component of pragmatic competence enables a speaker to be ‘contextu-
ally appropriate’ or in Hymes’s words, to know ‘when to speak, when not, what to talk about with whom,
when, where and in what manner’ (1972: 277).

2.2.3 Discourse competence

Consider the following example. The teacher is asking her English class about the Great Storm of 1987 in
Britain:

    Teacher    What did the hurricane do?

Of the responses, she commends Student D for a number of reasons.

    Student A The hurricane uprooted the trees.
    Student B The trees were uprooted.
    Student C Hundreds of trees were uprooted by the hurricane.
    Student D It uprooted hundreds of trees.

All of these responses are grammatically acceptable, but Students B and C put new information first, and
as Widdowson (1978) points out, it is more normally the case in discourse that shared information (about
the hurricane) precedes new information (about its effects). Furthermore, Student D uses a reference item,
‘It’, as a cohesive device to relate the answer to the question and this fits in with the normal pattern of oral
discourse. In this way, a unified spoken text is achieved.

Learners of English will need to become aware of how discourse works in terms of the common cohesive
devices used in English. These can be demonstrated by working backwards in a conversation (Crystal and
Davy 1969) between two speakers in which the final exchanges are:

    B Well, it feels healthier, doesn’t it?
    A Yes.
    B And seems healthier ...
    A Yes.
    B The theory is that they distract each other ... but that’s life, isn’t it?
(adapted from Crystal and Davy 1969: 102)
It is immediately apparent that this is taken from an ongoing conversation as the pronouns ‘it’, ‘they’, and ‘each other’ substitute for previous noun phrases or even whole situations described earlier in the conversation. The comparative ‘healthier’ used in a parallel structure shows both continuity of meaning and development of an earlier suggestion. Interpretation of the topic by a listener who came in at this point would be impossible. The exchanges preceding these give more clues but still the use of ‘ones’ has to be interpreted.

B ... it still tends to be true that most of the best ones are single sex ...
A Mm ...
B As far as I can gather ... best in terms of... you know ...
A Records to show ...
B Yes...
A I can’t see why because I’m convinced that mixed ones are the soundest... I mean overall... the soundest...

(adapted from Crystal and Davy 1969: 101, 102)

A culturally aware listener, coming into the conversation here, might be able to interpret that the conversation is about schools, single sex and mixed ones, but many listeners would be lost if they had not heard the conversation from the beginning, where the mention of a single school starts the discussion.

This extract of authentic conversation between native speakers shows three other aspects of competence in conversational use of language: how to perform the turns in discourse; how to maintain the conversation, and how to develop the topic. Second language learners will need to acquire useful language for strategies such as initiating, entering, interrupting, checking, and confirming in conversation. For example, they will need to learn the typical discourse markers which signal the direction of discourse such as ‘By the way ...’ (introducing an incidental remark); ‘I’d like to take up an earlier point ... ’ (returning to consider an earlier argument), and ‘That’s all very well but...’ (challenging an argument).

Learners will also need to develop a similar kind of competence for written texts. For example, students reading technical English will have to follow the structure of different types of expository prose such as descriptions of processes, cause-effect analyses, and comparisons of systems. They will need to understand the relationships between the propositions of adjoining sentences and to interpret these relationships through formal devices, as in this example:

The population is ageing. That is to say, there is a higher percentage of people over the age of sixty than at any time previously this century.

Here, the second sentence is a reformulation of the proposition in the first and serves as an explanation. The connective ‘That is to say’ links the meaning of the two.

These various abilities needed to create coherent written texts or conversation, and to understand them, have together been termed discourse competence (Canale and Swain 1980; Faerch, Haasturp, and Phillipson 1984), or textual competence (Bachman 1990).

### 2.2.4 Strategic competence

Canale and Swain define strategic competence as ‘how to cope in an authentic communicative situation and how to keep the communicative channel open’ (1980: 25). Strategic competence consists of using communication strategies. These strategies come into play when learners are unable to express what they want to say because they lack the resources to do so successfully. They compensate for this either by changing their original intention or by searching for other means of expression. For example, in this conversation between a native speaker of English and a Swedish student, it is possible to see a number of strategies at work.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Native speaker</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Every summer we go for a for ... , you know, erm, ... fjorton dagar, ... um ... fourteen days ... a for ... I mean ...</td>
<td>Oh, a fortnight.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native speaker</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, a fortnight. We go for a fortnight to our summer stuga.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native speaker</td>
<td>What’s that?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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6
**Student**  It’s a small house in the country. It has, you know, a garden around it... [gestures a circle to show an area of surrounding land]

**Native speaker**  Oh, like a cottage, a country cottage...

The Swedish student only half remembers the word ‘fortnight’ and doesn’t know the word ‘cottage’. In the first instance of ‘fortnight’ she uses the Swedish word and then gives a literal translation of it, ‘fourteen days’. She continues with the paraphrase ‘two weeks’. At the same time, she invites co-operation from her listener through the implicit appeal for help in ‘you know’ and ‘I mean’. In the second instance, ‘cottage’, she code-switches to Swedish first then paraphrases, assisted by gesture, and again appeals for help with ‘you know’. In summary, all of her strategies could be termed achievement strategies. She perseveres with what she is trying to say and finds ways of compensating for her insecure or inadequate knowledge of English.

This student’s efforts can be compared with an example from the classroom. A Spanish student has been asked to make statements of probability to practise ‘She might have ...’, ‘She could have ...’, and ‘She must have ...’ about a picture of a sombre, black clad woman. The student ventures:

It’s a picture of a woman. She ... I think she ... I think she is at a funeral. Perhaps her son has died. She is very sad.

This might be called a reduction strategy as she avoids the forms of which she is uncertain and selects the ‘perhaps’ structure which she knows.

The above examples demonstrate a number of strategies. Accounts of others can be found in Faerch, Haastrup, and Phillipson (1984) and Ellis (1985). Clearly the advantages of using achievement strategies or taking risks with the language is that they keep the conversation going and may encourage the listener to provide the necessary language. Second language acquisition research suggests that the exposure of learners to language provided at a point of need and in a meaningful context which they have created for themselves in trying to express something is a good situation for acquisition.

The question arising is whether strategic competence can be trained. Certainly teachers can help students early in a language programme by teaching them appropriate questions for requesting help, for example ‘What does this mean?’ and ‘How do you say ...?’, and the language to ask for vocabulary items, for example ‘What do you call a person who ...?’ and ‘What do you call a thing that ...?’. The teacher can also act as listener in classroom interaction and respond to students’ appeals for help, providing language at the point of need. There is little in current ELT materials, however, to suggest that learners receive much help in how to deal with problems themselves as they try to express themselves in English. Strategy training is an issue which needs to be further addressed in ELT.

### 1.1.5 Fluency

The term ‘fluency’ relates to language production and it is normally reserved for speech. It is the ability to link units of speech together with facility and without strain or inappropriate slowness, or undue hesitation. Faerch, Haastrup, and Phillipson include fluency as a component of communicative competence and distinguish it from strategic competence in this way:

> Whereas strategic competence presupposes a lack of [accessible] knowledge, fluency covers speakers’ ability to make use of whatever linguistic and pragmatic competence they have (Faerch, Haastrup, and Phillipson 1984: 168).

They list three types of fluency:

- **semantic fluency**: linking together propositions and speech acts
- **lexical-syntactic fluency**: linking together syntactic constituents and words
- **articulatory fluency**: linking together speech segments.

(ibid.: 143)

These types can be appreciated in the following extract from a conversation:

A When will you be taking your driving test?
B The day after my birthday.
A And when’s your birthday? Remind me.
B September 27th.

The purpose of A’s question is to find out the exact date of B’s driving test so that she can send a good luck card. B’s answer mistakenly assumes that A knows the date of his birthday. A therefore has to listen, assess that she does not get the information she wants, and formulate another question which will elicit more precise information from which she can deduce the date of the test. This ability to respond coherently within the turns of the conversation, to link the words and phrases of the questions, to pronounce the sounds clearly with appropriate stress and intonation, and to do all of this quickly, in what Johnson (1979) calls ‘real time’, is what constitutes fluency.

ELT has addressed the issue of how to develop fluency in various ways. Coursebooks in the 1970s often contained fluency drills, but these were aimed solely at increasing the learner’s ability to link syntactic segments with ease. For example, the teacher would set up a chain drill and provide each student with a different prompt which they would have to insert in the correct syntactic position, as in:

Students I went to the theatre last night.
Teacher My aunt’s house.
Student 1 I went to my aunt’s house last night.
Teacher Visited.
Student 2 I visited my aunt’s house last night.
Teacher Yesterday.

More recently, teachers have debated whether it is possible to teach gambits to help learners become more fluent, particularly learners who need to use English in their community or in their profession and who need to keep the attention of their listeners. We use gambits in a meeting when we want to hold the floor, for example, ‘I’d just like to make another quick point’; to interrupt, for example ‘Can I just come in here’, or to respond, for example ‘I agree with that in part but

The idea of teaching gambits fits well with insights from recent research into what Nattinger (1988) has called ‘lexical phrases’. These are items of prefabricated language, learned holistically as chunks, and include not only phrases but clauses and sentences too, as in the examples above. Nattinger suggests that this kind of lexical learning plays a much stronger role in language learning than previously appreciated. The advantage of teaching lexical phrases is that, if they can be retrieved quickly from memory, they will help learners to produce the language more fluently.

Certainly, practice activities in spoken English will need to involve learners in interpreting and assessing the meaning of what they hear and constructing appropriate responses independently of language input from the teacher or textbook. This implies activities in which students will determine the content of what they say in interaction with other students.
9.2.2 What activities characterize the writing process?

Planning
First, good writers concentrate on the overall meaning and organization of a text, and engage in planning activities. This will involve thinking about the purpose of the writing, for example, a letter of complaint about poor service, or a letter to inform friends about a daughter’s wedding. The particular purpose implies an organization for the writing and a style appropriate for the readers. The letter of complaint would follow formal conventions of layout and be in a serious disapprobatory style. The letter to friends would be informal, expressive, probably colloquial, and a mixture of description and comment.

The amount of planning will vary, therefore, in relation to the type of writing task, from relatively spontaneous writing based on a quick mental plan, to something carefully worked out beforehand in notes. However, it will also differ according to the preferred style of the individual writer, and considerable variation has been observed here. Some learners who appear to take very little time for thinking before starting to write nevertheless produce effective writing. They may, instead, pause frequently to reflect during writing. Flower and Hayes (1981) contributed to our understanding of planning when they suggested that it goes on at many levels and throughout the process of composing. One level is that of the sentence, as writers turn the overall plan into text and draft out their ideas in English. But good writers also work episodically to set goals which structure the next unit of writing. This is often what they are doing during the ‘pregnant pauses’ in composing. Any initial planning before writing is therefore subject to review at any point as the writer critically evaluates the emerging text and thinks of new ideas and new ways to organize and express them. Widdowson points to this tendency when he says: ‘In writing one so frequently arrives at a destination not originally envisaged, by a route not yet planned for in the original itinerary’ (1983: 41). If, indeed, episodic planning allows for an interplay between writing and thinking, a methodology which encourages students to plan in detail before writing and to keep to that plan, is naive and possibly counter-productive. A more flexible approach is required.

Revising
Typically, as we have seen, a good writer proceeds through alternating phases of writing and reflection. During reflection, writers may re-read the sentences on the page or look back at their original plan and think about how to express the next set of ideas. After writing part of the draft, they may then review the text and ask themselves questions such as: ‘Is my argument expressed through a clear set of points or does my reader have to make conceptual leaps in order to follow me?’, ‘Are any sections repetitious and can they be missed out?’, and ‘Do I need to rearrange any sentences?’ In this way, additions, deletions, and rearrangements can be made in order to improve the writing. It is noteworthy that all of these questions are to do with meaning and organization. Studies by Perl (1979) and Sommers (1980) showed that less experienced writers were constantly concerned with grammar and correctness and this distracted them from thinking about clarity of ideas and organization.

Seminal work was carried out in this area by Faigley and Witte (1981). They concluded from the findings of two studies that expert writers revise in different ways from inexperienced writers, but also in different ways from each other:

One expert writer ... made almost no revisions; another started with an almost stream-of-consciousness text that she then converted to an organized essay in the second draft; another limited his major revisions to a single long insert; and another revised mostly by pruning. (Faigley and Witte 1981:110)

They pointed out that the extent and nature of revision depends not only on the writer’s skill but also on the purpose of the writing, the genre, the level of formality required, and the degree of familiarity with the readers, the subject, or the type of writing task. These factors can easily be appreciated if we compare writing a letter of complaint to an unknown person for the first time with a regular letter containing news to friends overseas. The first would probably receive rather more careful revision than the second. It is therefore not the amount of revision that is significant but its effect in making improvements, and this depends on the degree to which the revisions help the writing to express the writer’s goals clearly, to fit the genre, and be at the appropriate level of formality. Any classroom activities devised to encourage effective revision will need to help student writers in English to see how it relates to all aspects of writing.
Producing ‘reader-based’ prose

A third characteristic of successful writers is that they are aware of their readers and seek to produce ‘reader-based’ prose (Flower and Hayes 1980). In other words, they think about what the reader needs to know, how to make information clear and accessible, and what is an appropriate style (for example, formal, friendly, or persuasive). Most writing undertaken in the real world has a particular readership in view: a friend, a tutor, or an official of some kind. It is knowledge of that readership which provides a context for the writing and which influences the selection of content and style. For example, a description of a person will differ in content and style according to whether it is of a literary character in an academic essay, of a wanted person in a police bulletin, of a pop-singer in a teenage magazine, or of a new boyfriend in a letter to parents. In this sense writing is social and interactive in nature as the writer conducts a ‘dialogue’ with a putative reader, anticipating the responses and selecting appropriate information, ideas, and expressions to influence those responses. Good writers are sensitive to the audience of their writing.

9.3 What are the implications of a process approach?

The issues that arise for teachers from insights into what makes a successful writer are whether we can teach strategies for planning, revising, and editing, and whether we can help students develop a sense of audience. A process approach tries to provide useful support for student writers. The nature of the support will depend on the kind of learners, for example their ages, backgrounds, and needs for writing in English. It could be argued that adult learners should already have developed effective writing strategies in their first language. However, it may well be the case that students have not received the necessary support in their first language and will benefit from a process approach in the English language classroom, whatever their age. The primary aim of the process approach, therefore, is to help students to gain greater control over the cognitive strategies involved in composing. This suggests a number of principles for the teacher to incorporate into the teaching of writing.

9.3.1 Helping students to generate ideas

One of the hardest tasks in writing is getting started. In academic writing, when tutors set assignments, a first step in pedagogy could be to encourage students to work in pairs and arrive at an understanding of the task by questioning and clarifying the meaning of key expressions and selecting the information needed to fulfill the task. In the general EFL classroom, when tasks are set for practice purposes, the teacher has the responsibility of helping students get their ideas together. White and Arndt (1991) make a useful distinction between guided techniques in which prompts such as questions are used, and unguided techniques in which students generate ideas by themselves. Materials extract 9.A is an example of a guided technique. Students are guided through a possible list of contents for a biography and select those they are prepared to talk about to a partner, who will write the biography. The next step is note-making on the topics preparatory to writing the first draft.

A popular unguided technique is brainstorming, which is shown in Materials extract 9.B. Both 9.A and 9.B demonstrate the help that teachers can give as students think out a topic, discover a purpose, and decide on a perspective in the early stages of writing. Notice that these activities show how writing can be stimulated by students working interactively. Such interaction has the value of providing student writers with an audience on whom to test out the selection of content. However, we need to keep in mind the solitary nature of most writing and move students gradually towards the independent position of a writer engaged in a real writing task.

9.3.2 Providing practice in planning

If teaching methodology is to support planning, then classroom activities need to guide students in finding their own effective planning processes. Given that we know successful writers plan their writing in very different ways, this needs great care. Many teachers now take the view that the best help they can give is to provide students with ideas for planning in the early stages and to let them take up those which they find individually useful and attractive. At the same time, it is essential to communicate the flexible nature of plans, which ideally should change and be adjusted as the writing progresses and generates alternative ideas and structures.
1 In this project, you are going to find out about another learner and write a profile of them in about 200 words for everyone else to read. First find a partner to work with on this project.

2 Look through this list of possible contents for your biography. Which words in the Ust mean important?

Possible contents of your biography:
- name
- profession
- marital status
- current living arrangements
- crucial events in your life
- key influences in your life (childhood and adult)
- your major achievements
- regrets or frustrations in your life
- unfulfilled ambitions
- your main hopes/goals for the future
- leisure activities
- your attitudes to your family, relationships, work or other issues
- how other people see you

Together, add any other possible topics to the Ust.

3 Decide which of the topics (about five or six) you would be prepared to talk about, or would like someone to write about you.

Now tell your partner about the topics you have chosen. They should listen and write brief notes, like this:

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Marko
marital status: married to American, Dan (met travelling)
two children Masako (5), Elliot (3)
achievements: passing university exams when pregnant
winning regional painting competition.
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### 1.3 Making mind maps

Making a mind map is a strategy for note-making before writing; in other words, scribbling down ideas about the topic and developing those ideas as the mind makes associations. The topic used for demonstration below is the festival of Christmas, which would be appropriate to certain groups of students. However, the strategy can be used to explore almost any topic.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEVEL</th>
<th>Intermediate to advanced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TOPIC</td>
<td>A festival</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PREPARATION</td>
<td>This activity is best carried out quite simply with blackboard and chalk so that students grasp the idea of drawing a mind map as a spontaneous pre-writing activity.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| IN CLASS    | 1. Ask students to close their eyes and think of Christmas. They should jot down all the things associated with Christmas that come into their minds. Set a definite time limit (one or two minutes). Let them jot down things in their first language if they do not know the English words. They can then start sharing what they have jotted down. As they listen to other students making suggestions and to your explanations and corrections, they will learn the English words for the ideas which they have tried to jot down. This is an invaluable way in which to learn vocabulary.  
   2. Elicit ideas from the students as they suggest things, and make a collective mind map on the blackboard as the ideas are suggested, so that they can see how you draw out aspects of the topic and subgroup items. The reasoning behind mind maps is that we do not think in an ordered or linear way, but rather explore a topic by moving between its various aspects. The map may look something like this when it is under way, but elements would be added in random fashion: |

![Mind Map](image)

Branches can be drawn and added as students suggest new ideas or add ideas to already established aspects. The end result is a map with a number of subtopics or aspects radiating from the central topic and with further points added to these. Where there are links (Christmas food is, in one sense, an aspect of family celebrations), a line can be drawn associating them.

(Hedge: *Writing*, page 30)
The ‘brainstorming’ in Materials extract 9.B is an example of one such possible technique. This generates ideas through individual reflection: these are scribbled down and developed as the mind makes associations. In the task in Materials extract 9.B students are taken through two further steps: elicitation by the teacher of points for content so that ideas are shared and exchanged, then collation of some of those on the blackboard, in the form of a mind map. The next step is to ask students to work in pairs to decide on a logical sequence of information for the description. The advantage of mind maps as a planning strategy, particularly for descriptions, is that all aspects of a topic can be easily seen in relation to each other and possible links between sections of the composition suggest themselves. This can assist with advance planning of the overall text.

Writing materials now seek ways of helping students to organize their ideas: through planning in groups, guided note-making, strategic questions by the teacher, organizing points in a hierarchy of importance for presentation, highlighting essential information, sequencing given information, and sorting and matching ideas. All of these techniques give initial support for what will eventually be a process undertaken individually.

9.3.3 Contextualizing tasks to develop a sense of audience

Helping student writers to develop a sense of audience is another important task. With less mature writers, who may not have developed a sense of audience in writing in their first language, we can create audiences and build up awareness of the reader. For example, sometimes students can write for real audiences outside school such as local English-speaking organizations or individuals. The school can also provide an audience with its population of English language learners; for example, class magazines can be published for the wider school community. Within the classroom it is possible for the teacher to set up pairwork in which one student’s writing forms the basis for a response from the other student in the pair; for example, both students write a letter of invitation. At this stage they can help each other plan and draft. If their discussion is in English, this constitutes natural fluency practice. The students then exchange the letters and write replies, accepting or declining the invitation. Another typical task is the exchange of letters to an ‘agony aunt’ in a magazine and replies offering solutions. The principle involved in these letter exchanges is that of task dependency as the success of the exchange depends on the clarity of the letters to their readers: this reflects the interaction of reading and writing in real life.

As students work on writing tasks it is important that they ask themselves who they are writing for and keep that audience in mind as they write.

Materials extract 9.C provides a useful checklist of questions for the student writer. This is just the beginning of the task for a writer, who would also use a sense of audience to decide in what order to present the information.

Materials extract 9. C

| Whatever your purpose, you must decide what information you have about your audience that is relevant to your purpose and take that information into account as you write. The following questions, to be asked each time you choose a purpose and an audience for your writing, will help you focus on that audience and the choices you need to make in order to write for that audience. |
| Who is your audience? |
| 1 For what age group are you writing (children, adolescents, young adults, middle-aged adults, older adults)? |
| 2 For what socioeconomic group are you writing (poor people, middle class people, upper class people)? |
| 3 How much education does your audience have (elementary, high school, college, postgraduate)? |
| 4 How much knowledge about your subject can you assume your audience has (none, very basic, above average, very thorough)? |
| 5 What very important information must you give your audience before they can begin to think about your position in this argument (if your purpose is to convince) ? |
| 6 What reasons, examples, or illustrations will you give to support your ideas? |
| 7 What arguments may your audience give to counter your reasons? |
8 What values related to this topic do you share with your audience?
9 What arguments can you make for your position that support the values that you and your audience have in common?
10 What arguments can you make for your position that support values that your audience has, but that are not your values?

After you have decided your purpose, chosen a particular audience in mind, analyzed your audience, and determined the relevant information about your audience that you must consider as you write, you will next make a plan for your writing.

(Donahue Latulippe: Writing as a Personal Product, pages 40-1)

### 9.3.4 Encouraging students in revision strategies

Many teachers now hold the view that the traditional procedure of taking work in, marking it, and returning it to students when the writing experience is no longer fresh in their minds, has serious disadvantages. This is especially the case if little work is done in class on revising as it gives students the impression that the teacher is primarily responsible for improving the quality of their written work. A variety of procedures are now used to support revision, and these need to be evaluated against what we know of how good writers go about the process.

A popular procedure is **conferencing**, as demonstrated in the transcript in the Introductory task to this chapter. As the class writes, the teacher can talk with individual students about work in progress. Through careful questioning, the teacher can support a student writer in getting ideas together, organizing them, and finding appropriate language. Keh (1990) reports positive student feedback on conferencing. She suggests an elicitation procedure with focusing questions such as ‘Who are you writing to?’ and ‘How have you organized your points?’

Conferencing is a useful technique during the earlier stages of composition when writers are still thinking about content and organization. A popular device at a slightly later stage is the use of a checklist. This example in Materials extract 9.D is for individual use. Notice that these questions focus on the overall content and organization, and its appropriateness to purpose and audience. Other types of checklist can be used when students exchange drafts for comment and can focus on a recent teaching point. For example, a checklist on paragraphing could contain the questions:

- Does the composition divide naturally into several parts?
- Do the paragraphs reflect those parts?
- Does each paragraph have a topic sentence with a main idea?
- Does each paragraph have an effective concluding sentence?

**Reformulation** is a useful procedure when students have produced a first draft and are moving on to look at more local possibilities for improvement. It has the particular advantage that it provides students with opportunities to notice any differences between the target model and their own production (see Chapter 5) and thus to acquire language forms. Reformulation (Allwright 1984) proceeds through the following stages:

1. All the students carry out a guided writing task. The task is guided to ensure that the content and organization of their writing is similar overall. Indeed, collaborative work could be used at the planning stage.
2. Each student writes a first draft and hands it to the teacher.
1 First answer these questions about your audience:
   Who is your audience? What interest do they have in this subject? What do they already know about this subject?

2 Then answer these questions about your purpose:
   What did you want to accomplish by writing this paper? To entertain your audience? To educate them? To inspire them to do something? To help them understand something new? To help them see something familiar from a new point of view? To change their minds about something?

3 Next write the main idea of your draft in a complete sentence. Ask yourself these questions:
   Is the main idea stated somewhere near the beginning of the paper? If not, would the paper be more effective if you did state the main idea? No matter where the main idea appears in your draft (or even if it is only implied), is the main idea clear to you? Do you think it is clear to your audience?

4 Considering the audience you are writing for and your purpose, analyze the development of your paper:
   a Support material: type and amount
   Do you need to develop any ideas more fully? Do you need to be more specific or concrete in your explanations? How would you answer them now? Did you include all the information you needed to discuss your topic as fully as you wanted? Should you add anything to your discussion? b Support material: relevance
   Did you give your readers enough background information for them to understand not only your ideas but also the relevance of your discussion for them? Is there any irrelevant information, information the audience either already knows or does not need to know to understand your explanations? Should you delete any sections of your discussion?
   Have you said anything your reader is likely to object to? Did you answer those anticipated objections? Have you said anything your reader may not understand? c Support material: arrangement
   Does your discussion move smoothly and logically from one idea to the next? Is each new idea explained sufficiently before you move on to the next one? Are the ideas clearly linked together? Do you lead your readers step by step to understand your ideas? Should you rearrange any sections of your paper?

5 Analyze your conclusion:
   Does the conclusion develop logically from what you have written? Do you think it gives the reader the feeling that you have said everything you intended to say about your subject?

---

### Materials extract 9. D

1 First answer these questions about your audience:
   Who is your audience? What interest do they have in this subject? What do they already know about this subject?

2 Then answer these questions about your purpose:
   What did you want to accomplish by writing this paper? To entertain your audience? To educate them? To inspire them to do something? To help them understand something new? To help them see something familiar from a new point of view? To change their minds about something?

3 Next write the main idea of your draft in a complete sentence. Ask yourself these questions:
   Is the main idea stated somewhere near the beginning of the paper? If not, would the paper be more effective if you did state the main idea? No matter where the main idea appears in your draft (or even if it is only implied), is the main idea clear to you? Do you think it is clear to your audience?

4 Considering the audience you are writing for and your purpose, analyze the development of your paper:
   a Support material: type and amount
   Do you need to develop any ideas more fully? Do you need to be more specific or concrete in your explanations? How would you answer them now? Did you include all the information you needed to discuss your topic as fully as you wanted? Should you add anything to your discussion? b Support material: relevance
   Did you give your readers enough background information for them to understand not only your ideas but also the relevance of your discussion for them? Is there any irrelevant information, information the audience either already knows or does not need to know to understand your explanations? Should you delete any sections of your discussion?
   Have you said anything your reader is likely to object to? Did you answer those anticipated objections? Have you said anything your reader may not understand? c Support material: arrangement
   Does your discussion move smoothly and logically from one idea to the next? Is each new idea explained sufficiently before you move on to the next one? Are the ideas clearly linked together? Do you lead your readers step by step to understand your ideas? Should you rearrange any sections of your paper?

5 Analyze your conclusion:
   Does the conclusion develop logically from what you have written? Do you think it gives the reader the feeling that you have said everything you intended to say about your subject?

---

3 The teacher ‘marks’ the work by indicating problems by means of underlining or highlighting.

4 The teacher chooses one student’s essay and reformulates it, following the ideas closely but improving the expression in terms of accuracy and appropriacy.

5 The original and the reformulation are copied so that students can compare them. In well-resourced institutions photocopying will be possible, but it is also possible for sections of the composition, at least, to be written on the board.

6 The class works in pairs and groups, identifying the changes in the reformulation and discussing the reasons for them. This task can be done in the first or second language.

7 The teacher, with the class, discusses the changes and gives a rationale, inviting comments and questions.

8 Students then go through their own first drafts and revise them in the light of any useful information they have gained.

My experience has been that, in early attempts to make use of reformulation, students often over-correct their own work, but that after several opportunities to practice they can be encouraged to take a more measured approach and to pick up only those things of most use for their own writing. The advantage of reformulation is that it allows discussion of such aspects as how ideas are developed, how a range of structures, vocabulary, or connecting devices can be used, and how the style needs to be appropriate to the readers.
The essential element in the techniques described above—conferencing, revisions with the help of a checklist, and reformulation—is that they all provide feedback to the writer. It will be the role of the teacher to provide the final feedback on the completed piece of work but, even here, there are choices to be made. A number of different marking strategies are available, for example: replacing the student's writing with a more accurate or appropriate form; indicating a problem by underlining and inviting the student to self-correct, and locating an error and giving it a symbol to denote the type of error. It is also possible to indicate in the margin that there is an error of a particular kind somewhere on that line and ask students to locate and correct it. These last two strategies require a coding system. The one in Figure 9.1 was developed by a group of upper-intermediate students in negotiation with their teacher.

Figure 9.1 An example of a coding system for correcting written work

```
WF  wrong form: the best will be its achievements
WW  wrong word: patient funny and kindly
T   wrong tense: in the last few weeks you didn't have much fun
ʌ  something is missing: You arrived in Brighton, the 1st
Sp  wrong spelling: comfortable
WO  wrong word order: You haven't seen yet London
P   wrong punctuation: Look out.
V   wrong verb form: The Titanic sunk very quickly
// new paragraph needed:
◊  not necessary: John came in and he sat down
▽  You don't need a new sentence.
   Join up the ideas
?   I don't understand what you're trying to say.
...
This isn't quite right: it needs clearer
   expression (usually the teacher provides an
   alternative)
[ ] This part needs to be re-arranged or reworded.
!! You really should know what's wrong here
   because
   - we've just done it in class.
   - I've told you so many times.
```

The revision strategies described above have the same aim of encouraging students to see writing as something that can be improved, and they train learners in looking for areas for improvement. It is worth every teacher’s while to ensure that a variety of techniques are used to encourage this essential activity in the writing process.
11.3.3 What assessment procedures are available?

Classroom assessment procedures include the conventional paper-and-pencil style of test, structured classroom observation, and other modes such as portfolios and self-assessment.

**Paper-and-pencil tests**

These are the tests with which most readers are familiar, and several examples of test items are given in 11.2.2. Paper-and-pencil tests are structured, tend to be formal, and are administered under controlled conditions with both stimulus and learner response in written form. They are very well-documented in published testing handbooks which take a teacher/test designer through the test construction process. One short section of a chapter cannot hope to examine aspects of test design and construction in any detail and the reader is therefore recommended to volumes such as Hughes (1990); Weir (1993); Alderson, Clapham, and Wall (1995); and Bachman and Palmer (1996). Heaton (1989, 1990) are useful resources for writing objectively scored tests.

A number of considerations influence both the approach to test design and the content of the tests themselves. One of these, as we saw earlier, is to do with the view of language held by the teacher or coursebook writer and whether the focus is on language form or on communicative aspects of language. Another is the link between the test and the syllabus and materials being used in the classroom. For example, if the learners have been developing skills in producing a piece of writing for a particular kind of reader at an appropriate level of formality such as a letter of application to a course, then ideally the test should set up a task which requires a simulation of this purpose and audience, and the marking criteria will include appropriateness of style.

**Observation-driven learner assessment**

Observation-driven assessment has not yet developed in EFL contexts. The standard handbooks for teachers are all concerned with the test construction process rather than with the broader requirements of assessment in school settings (for example Hughes 1990; Weir 1993). We generally need to go outside the field of English foreign language education and look at mainstream language education in ESL settings (see McKay 1995) in order to learn about observation-driven approaches to assessment. These hold interesting potential for EFL. For example, in the context of primary children learning English as a second language, there has been a move since the late 1970s away from formal tests and towards overall assessment schemes, descriptive-based and formative. In England, examples of this are the early work of Barrs and her colleagues (Barrs, Ellis, Hester, and Thomas 1988) and Hester (1993), who promoted the use of observation to describe language learning development with a focus on both language and content. The following is an example of a teacher’s comments on the writing development of a pupil in the second year of an English primary school.

---

<PC2 Writing. Please comment on the child's progress and development as a writer in English and/or other community languages: confidence and independence as a writer; range, quantity, and variety of writing in all areas of the curriculum; pleasure and involvement in writing both narrative and non-narrative, alone or with others; influence of reading on the child's writing; growing understanding of written language, its conventions and spelling; development of handwriting.>

As a writer she has developed considerably over this year. She is independent, confident and fluent using writing for a range of purposes and audiences across the curriculum. She is able to sustain a correspondence over two terms, to make books autonomously, and to write in a transactional style. She is always clear about the context and form of her writing and spontaneously checks for spelling as she writes — prepared to change anything that it remained open-textually unclear. She is learning the English spelling system and in her writing uses phonetically spelled words and references back to her surroundings and her personal dictionary where needed.

---

(Hester 1993: 16)
With an increased focus on communicative activities in the classroom such as information-transfer tasks, role-play, and tasks designed to promote oral interaction (both listening and speaking skills), it can be argued that observation is a valid means of gathering information about the development of language skills and, particularly, those aspects of communicative language performance that are less easy to capture in a traditional paper-and-pencil format. Harris and McCann (1994) point out:

We often do reading tasks in class in lockstep fashion: the whole class reading one text and answering questions on it. Typical examples are the skimming and scanning activities so widely used or the ‘comprehension questions’ at the end of a text.

There are various ways of assessing this kind of reading in the classroom. The first is by going around the class while students are doing a reading activity and observing which students seem to be understanding it and which are having difficulties.

(Harris and McCann 1994: 17)

In the context of assessing reading in English as a second language, the need for a teacher to notice what a learner does when reading has been highlighted:

— whether the child uses illustration (initially to help retell the story, later to check guesses)
— whether the child makes use of the context to help work out the meaning; does what s/he reads make sense?
— whether the child reads in meaningful chunks, or word by word
— whether the child uses the structure of language to help work out the meaning
— whether the child uses knowledge of what words/letters look or sound like to help work out unknown words
— whether the child uses knowledge about books and written language to help work out meaning
— whether s/he makes a good guess at unknown words, or waits to be told
— whether s/he is using several strategies to get meaning from the text, or has heavy dependence on one strategy (e.g. phonic analysis)
— whether the child self-corrects, and seems to be monitoring her/his own reading.

(Hester 1993: 15)

Observation of learners on specific skills-based tasks can be planned into routine class schedules, but it needs to be well-managed in order to monitor progress in a principled, systematic, and comprehensive way over time.

Genesee and Upshur (1996) provide useful guidelines for planning classroom observation:

Planning classroom observation

1. Why do you want to observe and what decisions do you want to make as a result of your observations?
2. What aspects of teaching or learning that are appropriate to these decisions do you want to observe?
3. Do you want to observe individual students, small groups of students, or the whole class?
4. Will you observe students engaged in specific, pre-arranged activities or during routine classroom activities?
5. Will you observe on one occasion or repeatedly?
6. Will you incorporate non-linguistic content from the students’ other classes or from outside class?
7. How will you record your observations?

(Genesee and Upshur 1996: 83)

There are, of course, disadvantages to the use of classroom-based description of learner performance. It requires an investment of time to get a scheme up and running, and of resources in training teachers to use such systems. However, although the need for additional training might be viewed as a disadvantage from one perspective, from another it can be seen as a useful focus for in-service activity. And there are other advantages, too, in the form of a potentially fuller and more valid picture of what learners can and cannot do, and of stages in learner progress. Observation-driven assessment has the potential to provide the level of detail that the teacher, learner, or parent can use as a basis for constructive action. In the words of one teacher:
‘Comparing what I do now with what I used to do, the kind of recordkeeping I did before was mainly to show me what children had done ... they had read aloud to me; they had worked on the computer. But there wasn’t that fine detail of what the child could do, or was saying. There were notes but they tended to record what children had covered and what they’d done. I might have ticked to show that they know their number bonds up to 10. But there was nothing to say how they were approaching it, nor the level of understanding. I’m going deeper now into how they are learning.

It does take longer for me, but it’s worth it because I know so much more about each child. As it fits into my planning cycle, I find the planning and assessment dovetail together. But it also helps me to compare one child’s development with another, and to plan how, by grouping them, the particular skills of each can be shared. It heightens my awareness of the stages of development they are moving through.’ (Hester 1993: 38)

Observation-driven approaches to assessment require greater and qualitatively different teacher involvement than more traditional approaches: this includes a sound grasp of ways in which observation can be used to inform profiles of language learning development and learner progress, and the ability to use a broad range of tasks which facilitate this type of assessment.

Portfolios

An artist’s portfolio may contain a record of the different types of work created—a range of drawings or paintings over time, not only the most recent—and provides a comprehensive picture of his or her capabilities, strengths, and weaknesses. In the same way, portfolios as part of classroom assessment can include samples from a range of students’ work, for example writing, drawings, notes, audio- or video-recordings, extracts from projects, and performance on specific tests, to reflect different aspects of development, achievement, interest, and motivation. These samples of language can be kept in a variety of forms, for example notebooks, scrapbooks, loose-leaf binders, and box files. Students may be asked how they wish their work to be collated and stored.

One of the strengths of portfolios is the way in which they support the learning process. Tierney, Carter, and Desai (1991) (writing specifically of reading and writing, but this can be extended to other skills) suggest that portfolios help students to:

- Make a collection of meaningful work;
- Reflect on their strengths and needs;
- Set personal goals;
- See their progress over time;
- Think about ideas presented in their work;
- Look at a variety of work;
- See effort put forth;
- Have a clear understanding of their versatility as a reader and a writer;
- Feel ownership for their work;
- Feel that their work has personal reference.

(Tierney, Carter, and Desai 1991: 59)

Making the best use of portfolios requires careful management on the part of the teacher. Students, too, need to be introduced to this mode of assessment and sensitized to the ways in which portfolios can be used as the basis for dialogue with the teacher, identifying developments in their own work, and monitoring their own progress. Graves and Sunstein (1992) also recommends that teachers keep portfolios of their own work in order to increase their awareness of what is involved in the process:

We need more ... teachers who know portfolios from the inside .... Maintaining our own portfolios has contributed more to our understanding of their possibilities and use than virtually any other aspect of our work with them. (Graves 1992: 5)

In other words, keeping a personal portfolio may not only lead to the development of a critical perspective in the teacher, but it may also provide insights into their use which can then be shared with learners.
Self-assessment

The concept of self-assessment has already been introduced in 3.4.3, in connection with learner training and learner autonomy, as a means by which learners may be encouraged to monitor and check their own progress. Self-assessment has been around for some considerable time (see Oskarsson 1978) and, like portfolios, is a procedure which may involve the learner directly in the assessment process. Implicitly it recognizes that learners should be able to take responsibility in making decisions about their own language learning development.

Although there has been a certain ambivalence towards the suitability of this procedure for school learners, there is now a considerable body of research that demonstrates the benefits of self-assessment for many different types of learners. Numerous studies report on the use of self-assessment (for example, Blue 1988; Brindley 1989a; Lewis 1990). For a useful survey see Oscarson (1997).

Harris and McCann (1994) provide a range of potential formats for learner self-assessment. The activity in Materials extract II.B requires learners to reflect on what has been learned over a period of time and express it as marks out of 10.

Materials extract II.B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questionnaire 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Think about your progress this term. Give yourself a mark out of ten for these areas:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* speaking /10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* listening /10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* reading /10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* writing /10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* pronunciation /10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* grammar /10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* vocabulary /10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Harris and McCann: Assessment, page 84)

Materials extract II.C

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade these things (1-5) related to effort and attitude:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>participation in class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>use of English in class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>homework and projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>working in groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>planning and working on my own</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Harris and McCann: Assessment, page 86)

Materials extract II.C focuses learners’ attention on the effort they have made in class and on their attitudes to learning, and asks them to grade these in sequence. In contrast to the example in Materials extract II.B, which focuses on learner achievement, that in Materials extract II.C focuses on involvement in the learning process.

The activity in Materials extract II.D requires learners to reflect on how well they can use the target language to fulfil certain functions, and to estimate how well they can accomplish the listed activities, as well as to identify things that they are unable to do.
Such procedures are intended for use as part of routine class activity, and the areas in which learners are asked to self-assess directly reflects what has been taught.

Self-assessment is a flexible learning tool, and there are numerous ways to mould the style and content of the assessment to suit a particular course or group of learners. One of its strengths links up with the points made in 11.1 about the sometimes hostile environment of assessment. Self-assessment has the advantage of involving learners.

11.4 What characterizes good assessment practice?

11.4.1 Are affective considerations relevant to assessment?

Motivation is as relevant to assessment processes as it is to learning (see 1.3.4). Teachers need to try to understand what motivates their class and learners as well as to identify the problems that learners experience. One question we might ask is whether it would be relevant to include information about affective factors in profiling a learner’s general performance.

Heaton (1990) provides a performance profile in connection with the criteria of a learner’s attitude (‘persistence’ and ‘determination’) in learning English:

- 5 Most persistent and thorough in all class and homework assignments. Interested in learning and keen to do well.
- 4 Persistent and thorough on the whole. Usually works well in class and mostly does homework conscientiously. Fairly keen.
- 3 Not too persistent but mostly tries. Average work in class and does homework (but never more than necessary). Interested on the whole but not too keen.
- 2 Soon loses interest. Sometimes tries but finds it hard to concentrate for long in class. Sometimes forgets to do homework or does only part of homework.
- 1 Lacks interest. Dislikes learning English. Cannot concentrate for long and often fails to do homework.

(Heaton 1990: 116-17)
As a teacher, you may not necessarily agree with how this profile is framed, but it is one that could be readily modified to the needs of a specific group of learners in order to better understand their approach to language learning in your class. The issue of attitude is also taken up in Materials extract 11. E. This awareness-raising task for teachers also highlights other affective areas, namely learner co-operativeness, independence, creativity, and presentation.

If we take a broader brief for assessment, it might be relevant and useful to include the characteristics of the learner as well as the learner’s ability in the language. This is certainly information that parents might appreciate. It then becomes important to augment the existing and more conventional types of assessment procedure.

**Materials extract 11. E**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>a Attitude</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- is interested in class activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- is willing to offer opinions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- is co-operative with teacher/peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- is willing to respond to the opinions of others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b Co-operativeness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- is able to work in pairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- is able to work in groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- is able to work as a member of the whole class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- is able to share ideas and knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c Independence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- is able to plan and organise own work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- is able to self-correct where necessary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- is able to use sources of information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d Creativity and presentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- shows original thought, initiative, inventiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- presents work neatly and in an ordered manner</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Harris and McCann: *Assessment*, page 21)

### 11.4.2 How can good assessment practice be framed?

Assessment should be fair to all learners, and practicable. To this end a number of writers have put forward guidelines for good practice. In English language teaching these have been primarily with reference to test design and construction and have not been extended to classroom assessment processes (but see Harris and McCann 1994; Brindley 1995; Genesee and Upshur 1996).

It is important, too, that elements of good practice for an assessment *scheme as a whole* are understood. This is the area in which there is much to gain from developments in educational assessment. This extract from Tierney, Carter, and Desai (1991), for example, presents some of the features of a classroom-based assessment programme:

1. Assessment is based on what the child actually does. Student work and process are observed and analyzed to provide a rich view of progress, achievement, effort, strategies, and versatility.
2. Assessment addresses experiences in which students are engaged.
3. Classroom assessment procedures should describe clearly and accurately how students do on a variety of tasks over an extended period of time. Decisions about students’ strengths and needs are derived as a result of analyzing multiple samples of student work that have been collected during the course of the year and show the students’ versatility.
4. Effective classroom assessment programs are designed to include the students as active participants in forming tasks, in developing assessment criteria, and in assessing their own effort, progress, achievement, attitude, and goal attainment.
5. An assessment program should be multifaceted. There should be provisions to assess more than just the final products. Assessment should focus on achievement, process, and quality of self-assessment.
6 Assessment is continuous and inseparable from instruction. It is an interactive and collaborative process in which information is collected in natural classroom instructional encounters (individual, small group, and whole group). ...

7 A yearly assessment plan guides the timing and use of a variety of assessment procedures. These procedures should work together to form a composite. It is likely that there are regular assessments that occur weekly, quarterly, and yearly. These assessments may be varied and serve slightly different purposes.

8 Assessment strengthens teacher’s and student’s knowledge. Assessment should contribute to a teacher’s and student’s understanding of themselves and each other. ... Teachers and students should grow in their ability to make insightful analysis of the data gathered.

9 Record keeping and collections of work samples by both teachers and students provide the systematic information that facilitates communication.

10 The teacher is an expert evaluator, recognized and supported:
- The teacher not only knows the nature of the learners’ [work] ... but provides first-hand evidence of progress and achievement.
- The teacher has the opportunity to observe the learner first-hand across a variety of situations including those in which learners are interested, have varying degrees of background knowledge, interact with others, or proceed independently.
- The teacher can explore the environments and situations that enhance learning.
- The teacher assesses what students have achieved in terms of effort, improvement, and process.
- The teacher pursues collaborative assessment with the learner, as well as the learner’s ongoing assessment and development of self-assessment strategies.

11 The students’ ability to assess themselves is viewed as a measure of how testing and assessment have a meaningful, ongoing, and working relationship with teaching.

(Tierney, Carter, and Desai 1991: 35-7)

In addition to these points it is worth emphasizing that classroom assessment is shaped by the way in which the English curriculum is actually implemented according to the values of a given educational context. Syllabuses differ across contexts; teaching methodologies vary; there are different expectations of teachers, of learners, and of the teaching and learning experience more generally. Teachers may also differ in their confidence and fluency in using English in class. All of these powerful factors interact and are reflected both in the professional practice of the classroom and in the area of learner assessment. Assessment is shaped by its educational context and therefore will need to sit comfortably within it.