

GUIDED DISCOVERY

INTRODUCTION

Guided discovery is an approach to language learning which promotes **inductive** reasoning and the formulation of language **rules** from language **use**. This is opposed to more traditional **deductive** approaches which start with the explicit presentation of a language rule and require learners to later apply it via practice.

DEDUCTIVE APPROACHES (from language rules to language experience)	INDUCTIVE APPROACHES (from language experience to language rules)
• Explicit knowledge • Rule-driven learning • Application of rules • Teacher-centered • Dependent on teacher • Passive reception	• Implicit knowledge • Rule-discovery learning • Problem-solving • Learner-centered • Autonomous • Active participation

This approach has the benefit of replicating an environment where **natural** language learning takes place and it's particularly popular in contexts where learners enjoy a **hands-on** experience and **problem-solving** tasks. It promotes **active participation** and **collaboration**, and stimulates the development of **critical thinking** skills and learner **autonomy**.

Teachers who intend to use guided discovery in their lessons should be aware that this approach can be **time-consuming** (when planning) and **energy-consuming** (during the delivery) and it can lead learners to reach **wrong conclusions** about the rules. It can also be **frustrating** for learners who have poorer **analytic skills**.

Many believe that the **advantages** of guided discovery outweigh the disadvantages and that **challenging** learners to make a **cognitive effort** to understand how language works can have a **long-lasting** impact on retention.

However, teachers should consider their unique **contexts** and decide together with their learners if a new approach matches their **expectations**, **needs** and **preferences**.

Adapted from: Saumell, V. (n.d.)

GUIDED DISCOVERY TASK DESIGN

Any kind of **input** task can be designed with the **principles** of guided discovery in mind, be it a **grammar-focused** (e.g. the study of the Past Simple) or **skills-focused** (e.g. the study of a spoken or written genre) task.

Let's imagine that a teacher wanted to teach the *Past Simple* in a more learner-centered way. Let's imagine that the teacher had prepared a short **text** and **planted** examples of *Past Simple* verbs in this text.

A guided discovery task to **raise awareness** of aspects of meaning, use, form and pronunciation of the *Past Simple* could look like the following.

Last Saturday I invited my friends to my house and we celebrated my birthday together. I cooked dinner for them, and after dinner we talked. listened to music and played some games.

- Is the story about the present, the past or the future? _____
- Are the actions in the story completed or still happening? _____
- Do we know or don't know when the actions happened? _____
- Can you think of other time expressions similar to 'Last Saturday'? *E.g. Yesterday,* _____
- Look at the verbs underlined. How is their spelling similar? _____
- Look at the verbs underlined. Which verbs end with a /d/, /t/ or /ɪd/ sound? /d/ _____ /t/ _____ /ɪd/ _____

In this example, questions are designed to raise awareness of **meaning** and **use** (A to D), **form** (E) and **pronunciation** (F).

The same **principles** can be applied to any other target item. Let's imagine a teacher wanted the learners to 'discover' some functional language to *make informal suggestions* and *ways to reply*, and employed a dialogue. A possible task could look like the following.

Three roommates are at home on a Saturday evening thinking about what to do...

Ying - *Guys, it's getting boring here. Do you have any ideas for tonight?*
 Gabi - *How about going to the cinema?*
 Sasha - *Mmm... I'm not sure about that... What do you think, Ying?*
 Ying - *I'd rather go out and see some people. Shall we go to this new jazz bar in town?*
 Sasha - *Sounds good! I'd love to listen to some music! Are you in Gabi?*
 Gabi - *Well... it's a possibility, but I feel jazz will make us fall asleep! Why don't we go dancing instead?*
 Sasha - *That's a great idea! We can listen to music, meet people and have a few drinks. Ying?*
 Ying - *I'm in! Let's get changed!*

A. Look at the underlined expressions and categorize them below.

Making a suggestion	Saying YES to a suggestion	Saying NO to a suggestions
<i>How about...?</i>		

B. Are these expressions formal or informal?
 C. Is it polite to reply to a suggestion using a straight 'No'?

D. Consider the following expressions and generalize their structure.

How about... + (v -ing)
Shall we... + (_____)
Why don't we... + (_____)
I'd love to... + (_____)
I'd rather... + (_____)

E. Is the intonation of these questions rising or falling?

How about going to the cinema?
Shall we go to this new jazz bar?
Why don't we go dancing?

In this example, questions are designed to raise awareness of **meaning** and **use** (A to C), **form** (D) and **pronunciation** (E).

As you may have noticed, the exercises make use of **concept questions** that are designed to help learners **work out** the rules governing a particular language structure. This is a popular technique called '**elicitation**'. This technique is often used in a more **teacher-fronted** way with the teacher at the board building up knowledge **dialogically** with the learners using questions and answers. **Guided discovery tasks** use the same technique, but in a more **learner-centered** way that encourages learners to take a more active role.

Guided discovery tasks should not be regarded as tests, but rather as **problem solving** activities. Learners should be encouraged to complete the task **collaboratively** in pairs or small groups, with the teacher actively **monitoring** their work and providing **input** and **feedback** in response to emergent **needs**.

Modern **coursebooks** tend to make extensive use of guided discovery tasks. These are usually preceded by reading or listening **text** which is used as a **springboard** for grammar and vocabulary work. Guided discovery tasks can be easily **identified** as they are often called '*Grammar Spot*', '*Grammar Box*', '*Useful Language*', etc.

For other examples of **guided discovery** tasks and **elicitation**, please refer to the following handout:

- Teaching Grammar
- Teaching Writing

For more information on how to formulate and use **concept questions**, please refer to the following handout:

- Conveying Meaning & Concept Questions

TEACHING TIPS

- Guided discovery is an approach that can be:
 - a. teacher-led (if the teacher is at the board asking questions and eliciting the answers)
 - If you take a more 'teacher-led' approach, make sure you use questions for the purpose of elicitation consistently. You need to ensure that knowledge is created/revised in a dialogic way with the learners. However, a possible disadvantage is that the weaker / more reserved learners are less likely to actively participate in the process. Make sure you name learners and elicit in a more inclusive way.
 - b. learner-led (if the teacher designs a worksheet with questions that learners can answer independently and collaboratively).
 - If you take a more 'learner-led' approach and decide to use a guided discovery worksheet, make sure that (1) you monitor effectively by collecting as much performance data as possible while learners are on task; (2) you use this data to give learners sufficient language-related feedback and collect more evidence that learners have understood correctly. A possible disadvantage of this approach is that learners draw the wrong conclusions about certain rules: you must make sure (in feedback) that learners understood correctly. This can be done by asking relevant questions to check notions and concepts or asking learners to give you additional examples. Make sure you do this 'selectively' according to the performance data you collected during the task.
- When designing your own guided discovery worksheets, try to focus on aspects of meaning/use and form. Aspects of pronunciation may be more efficiently (and easily) addressed in a more 'teacher-fronted' way, e.g. by highlighting pronunciation features on the board (via elicitation), modelling and allowing pronunciation practice.
- When asking learners to work on guided discovery worksheets, make sure you encourage collaboration and peer support. However, you need to consider the learners' abilities and personalities very carefully: a possible disadvantage is that the stronger learners will dominate the activity. Group learners strategically.

FURTHER READING

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- Hedge, T. (2000). *Teaching and Learning in the Language Classroom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Chapter 5.4.1.
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- Thornbury, S. (2000). *How to Teach Grammar*. Harlow, UK: Pearson. Chapter 4.

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Saumell, V. (n.d.). *Guided Discovery for Language Instruction: A Framework for Implementation at all Levels*. (s.l.): Pearson. [online] Available at: <http://www.pearsonlongman.com/ae/emac/newsletters/guided_discovery.pdf> [Accessed on 10/01/2019].