

T-T-T | TEST-TEACH-TEST

INTRODUCTION

T-T-T stands for **Test-Teach-Test** (or **Task-Teach-Task**) and it refers to a way of sequencing lessons. It's a three-stage process that promotes **inductive learning** (language use before language study) and can be associated to **experiential learning theory** (learning by doing) and the pedagogical idea of **reactive focus on form** (instruction on grammar, vocabulary, etc. as knowledge gaps emerge during an activity). Some authors (e.g. Thornbury) consider T-T-T as a precursor to **Task-Based Learning** (TBL).

T-T-T is generally used in **grammar**, **vocabulary**, **speaking** and **writing** lessons, although in principle it can be used for **any kind** of lesson. In a typical T-T-T lesson, the **sequence** and **procedures** tend to be as follows.

Test (Task)

Learners complete a language activity designed to promote either the use of a target **language item** or the display of a target **skill**. The purpose of this activity is **diagnostic**, and it allows the teacher to identify the learners' current knowledge and abilities, and their immediate needs.

Teach

The teacher responds to these emergent needs by raising **awareness** of **selected** aspects of the target item (e.g. meaning/use, form or pronunciation) or the target skill (e.g. its sub-skills), usually via **explanation**, **elicitation** or **discovery**.

Test (Task)

Learners complete the **same** or **similar** language activity to promote the use of the target item or the display of the target skill. The purpose of this activity is to encourage an **improved** performance.

More '**deep-end**' applications of T-T-T (as in TBL) do not start with **pre-selected** language items or sub-skills in mind, but simply with the completion of a **communicative task**. As learners perform the task, the teacher identifies whatever language gaps emerge, and offers spontaneous instruction to fill those gaps and help the learners perform the same or similar task more effectively.

BENEFITS & CHALLENGES

The following is a (non-exhaustive) list of commonly mentioned benefits and challenges.

BENEFITS

- it may better respond to the needs of the learners
- it may raise awareness of personal knowledge gaps
- it may increase efficiency as no time is wasted teaching what learners already know
- it may be motivating for learners who like 'learning by doing'
- it may boost confidence (and sense of achievement) to see an improved performance in the final stage
- it may be motivating for learners who like to test their knowledge/abilities
- it may be helpful for the teacher's development to adapt their instruction to 'emergent' needs
- it may promote learner independence

CHALLENGES

- it may be challenging for learners who prefer language study (input) before language use (output)
- it may be challenging for the teacher to identify emergent needs and select what to teach
- it may be overwhelming for learners to start a lesson with a test of their knowledge/abilities
- it may be challenging for the teacher to teach 'off-the-cuff'
- it may be repetitive for learners to perform the same or a similar task
- it may be challenging for learners who are more teacher-dependent
- it may make lessons look aimless
- it may make lessons look less familiar as many course books sequence lessons in a different way

FRAMEWORK, PLANNING & ACTIVITIES

For more information on how to plan a T-T-T lesson, please refer to the following handout:

- **Lesson Frameworks & Planning Processes – T-T-T**

For more information on how to design practice and production activities, please refer to the following handout:

- **Designing Practice Activities**

For more information on Task-Based Learning, please refer to the following handout:

- **Task-Based Language Teaching**

TEACHING TIPS

- The T-T-T model is generally used for language systems lessons (i.e. grammar, vocabulary and functional language) and productive skills lessons (e.g. speaking and writing).
- Make sure activities used for testing and practice purposes are framed within a clear context and use this context coherently throughout the lesson.
- Make sure the activities used for testing purposes create the need to use the TL actively and allow learners to demonstrate procedural knowledge (i.e. ability to use the TL). Avoid using activities which test the learners' declarative knowledge (i.e. knowing the rules).
- Be prepared to clarify all aspects of the TL comprehensively, but make sure you limit your clarifications to what the learners found problematic in the first test. For some language items you may need to clarify aspects of meaning/use and pronunciation, for others only pronunciation, and so on. The clarification must be 'reactive' or the purpose of T-T-T would be defeated.
- Provide opportunities to develop accuracy via meaningful practice. Avoid mechanical manipulation of de-contextualized models of language (e.g. random sentence transformation).
- Provide opportunities to develop fluency via communicative practice. Make sure speaking or writing tasks have a clear objective, purpose and outcome.
- Try to add variety to the activities by considering the four skills (e.g. a bit of listening first; then some writing and finally speaking).
- Provide language support and immediate error correction, if necessary, during the accuracy-focused practice stage.
- Allow more freedom during the fluency-focused stage and avoid interrupting the flow of communication to insist on accuracy (unless errors are becoming systematic). Let learners practice freely and provide delayed error correction, if necessary.
- Don't focus on errors only when giving feedback to an activity: make sure you also inform learners on areas of success and provide positive reinforcement.
- When using T-T-T to deal with pre-selected language items (e.g. grammar, vocabulary, etc.), try to select language items that you assume learners have 'somehow' already been exposed to. It would be very demoralizing and demotivating for learners to be tested on something they are not expected to know.
- Focus on real-life communication and make sure you allow plenty of time for communicative practice in the final practice stage.

FURTHER READING

- Scrivener, J. (2011). *Learning Teaching. The Essential Guide to English Language Teaching. Third Edition*. London: Macmillan Education. Chapter 7(5).
- Thornbury, S. (2007). *An A-Z of ELT. A Dictionary of Terms and Concepts*. Oxford: Macmillan Education.
- Woodward, T. (2001). *Planning Lessons and Courses*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 4.7.