

## CHAPTER 3

# Checklist for Designing and Implementing Vocabulary Lessons

This chapter presents a checklist for designing and implementing effective vocabulary instruction lessons. The checklist, which appears in Figure 3.1, can be copied and used on a repeated basis as needed. It provides instructors with a good way to make sure that they are not forgetting any of the key elements of the input-based incremental (IBI) approach as they work to design and implement effective second language (L2) vocabulary lessons.

The rest of this chapter discusses the rationale for attending to each of the seven items in the checklist. At the end of the chapter, I demonstrate how the checklist can be helpful when attempting to design effective English L2 vocabulary lessons, including assessing the extent to which a lesson conforms to the IBI principles discussed in Chapter 2 and the seven-item checklist discussed in this chapter.

### 1. I DECIDED ON TARGET VOCABULARY AND MATERIALS NEEDED FOR THE ACTIVITIES

When defining the target vocabulary, each word and lexical phrase may be defined clearly from the start. Other vocabulary may arise as the various activities in the lesson are implemented, but it is good to have a clear idea of the minimum

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- ☐ 1. I decided on target vocabulary and materials needed for the activities.
  - ☐ 2. I designed the activities to be meaningful, educational, and interactive.
  - ☐ 3. I included cultural and historical information when appropriate.
  - ☐ 4. I made sure target vocabulary is presented repeatedly in the input first.
  - ☐ 5. I increased the difficulty of tasks involving target vocabulary gradually over time.
  - ☐ 6. I incorporated a number of the principles of the IBI approach.
  - ☐ 7. I included directly applicable research findings.
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*Figure 3.1 Checklist for IBI Vocabulary Instruction Lessons*

set of target vocabulary. If an instructor is working with a list of vocabulary from a textbook, that list can be used. As described in Chapter 1, numerous online sources are also available for selecting target vocabulary.

With regard to materials, it should be clear from the description of the various steps in the lesson what materials will be needed to implement the lesson. Keeping Principle 4 in mind, there is a wide variety of ways to present target vocabulary so that its meaning is comprehended. Instructors can use resources such as *realia* (real-world items), computer presentation programs with pictures, a picture file with pictures on cards, flash cards with target words and definitions (in a variety of different formats), videos, maps, among others. Prerecorded spoken input also can be used in the classroom along with other materials. Instructors can be as creative as they wish in their use of various materials to support the lesson.

## **2. I DESIGNED THE ACTIVITIES TO BE MEANINGFUL, EDUCATIONAL, AND INTERACTIVE**

The second and third guidelines suggest making the activities meaningful, educational, and interactive and including cultural and historical information when appropriate. Not every language learning activity need focus extensively on cultural or historical information, but IBI vocabulary lessons lend themselves well to incorporating such information and, by their nature, consistently involve the interpretation and negotiation of meaning. Even if an activity within a lesson involves defining target words or showing pictures that represent them, this activity is still inherently meaningful because it provides learners with an opportunity to make new form–meaning connections.

## **3. I INCLUDED CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL INFORMATION WHEN APPROPRIATE**

For English language learners, activities can be designed to focus on historical and cultural issues throughout the English-speaking world, but they need not stop there. Similarly, for learners of other L2s, IBI lessons can be designed to focus on historical and cultural issues relevant to the regions where the L2 is spoken as well as outside of those regions. Decisions about which historical and cultural issues to focus on may need to be made in consideration of the larger goals for the particular course being taught. The IBI approach is adaptable to the content of basically any course. It is flexible when it comes to content but consistent when it comes to promoting the buildup of vocabulary knowledge over time based on cognitive considerations related to the L2 learner and what is needed to acquire target vocabulary in an effective manner over time.

#### **4. I MADE SURE TARGET VOCABULARY IS PRESENTED REPEATEDLY IN THE INPUT FIRST**

This item stems from a view of vocabulary acquisition that considers the importance of input and input processing. If learners are not exposed to target words in the input, there is no way that they can learn the words. Well-designed IBI activities involve a variety of ways of presenting target words as input, well beyond simply having learners study translated lists of vocabulary. Although providing first language (L1) translations may be appropriate on some occasions, other techniques for presenting target words in the input may provide more opportunities for developing direct form–meaning connections between L2 word forms and their referents. The following are some of the many options available: using a picture file to present and discuss target words, providing definitions of target words, identifying and labeling realia, engaging learners in *total physical response* activities (see, e.g., Asher, 1982) that involve target vocabulary, using target vocabulary during a discussion on a particular topic, using vocabulary when telling a story, and providing readings that include target vocabulary.

#### **5. I INCREASED THE DIFFICULTY OF TASKS INVOLVING THE TARGET VOCABULARY GRADUALLY OVER TIME**

The fifth item on the checklist is a critical one because it concerns the *incremental* aspect of the overall approach. IBI vocabulary lessons typically involve a series of activities that build upon one another and that are connected in some way to a central topic, such as doing errands on Saturday morning in Bangkok, going for a walk and having an appetizer before dinner in Italy, or exploring the life and legacy of King Louis XIV. Although topics may vary widely, in each set of activities, the goal is to present the target vocabulary as input before requiring learners to produce the vocabulary or work with it in more demanding tasks. In other words, there should always be one or more activities in which learners are given opportunities to process target words as input and other activities that gradually increase in difficulty with regard to what they require learners to do with the target words. Frequent and repeated presentation of target words in the input should typically occur in the first couple of steps in a lesson, but additional presentations of target words in the input is very beneficial at later stages as well. What is critical is that the difficulty of tasks be minimized during the initial steps because learners need to use a substantial amount of their energy to process target words as input at that stage. Later on, it is important that activities push learners in a way that encourages them to develop more complete knowledge of the target vocabulary and to be able to use the target vocabulary in an increasingly fluent and effective manner when communicating with others.

## **6. I INCORPORATED A NUMBER OF THE PRINCIPLES OF THE IBI APPROACH**

The sixth item in the checklist is a reminder to incorporate many of the 10 principles of IBI vocabulary instruction. These principles are the foundation of the approach. The sample lesson presented toward the end of this chapter includes commentary that clarifies how specific principles can be incorporated. A set of target words also is provided for you to design a lesson on your own. Once you have had sufficient practice designing IBI activities, the process of incorporating principles in new lessons should become increasingly natural, but it can be helpful to reassess whether more principles can be incorporated for any particular lesson.

## **7. I INCLUDED DIRECTLY APPLICABLE RESEARCH FINDINGS**

The seventh and final item on the checklist emphasizes incorporating many directly applicable research findings related to L2 vocabulary learning, as Principle 10 also suggests. Chapter 2 outlined some research findings of this nature (in Table 2.2), including the following:

- the positive effects of giving learners opportunities to attempt to generate target words on their own (Barcroft, 2007a; McNamara & Healy, 1995; Royer, 1973)
- the positive effects of talker variability and voice-type variability (Barcroft & Sommers, 2005)
- the negative effects of presenting words in semantically based sets (Finkbeiner & Nicol, 2003; Tinkham, 1997)
- the positive effects of speaking-rate variability (Sommers & Barcroft, 2007)
- the positive effects of background music on L2 vocabulary learning (de Groot, 2006)
- the positive effects of gradually increasing the amount of time between presentations of a target word (Bahrick et al., 1993)

Other findings focus more on vocabulary learning during reading and are addressed in Chapter 5. In general terms, Principle 10 and this item of the checklist call for an ongoing consideration of the L2 vocabulary research literature in order to be able to expand on the present list of research findings that are directly applicable to the design and implementation of IBI activities or, for that matter, any set of activities designed to promote vocabulary learning.

The rest of this chapter presents a sample IBI vocabulary lesson along with commentary on how it incorporates IBI principles and attends to each item on the checklist, a set of target words that you can use to design a sample vocabulary lesson of your own, and some general comments about the set of target words and how to approach using them to design a lesson.

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## SAMPLE LESSON

### What Do You Think of Obstacle Course Television Shows Like *Wipe Out*?

**Target Words:** *concussion, contorted, foam, helmet, instant replay, obstacle, obstacle course, padded, ratings, the sky is the limit, to crash, to get knocked off, to get soaked, to injure, to spin, to splash, to wipe out, tube, wet suit*

**Step 1.** Discuss what obstacle course shows are, and ask students if they have seen them before, what they think of them in general, and names of different shows. When any new target vocabulary is introduced, define it clearly as part of the discussion. For example: *The other day I was watching this show called Wipe Out on TV. Wipe out is the term that surfers use to describe when they fall in the water, but the people on the show, the contestants, wipe out in a lot of different ways. I read online that there are British, Australian, and American versions of this show. They're all called Wipe Out. I think all of the shows are based on contestants who have to go through obstacle courses. If you know the meaning of the word obstacle—something that gets in your way or blocks your way—you can probably understand what obstacle courses are. To go through an obstacle course, you have to confront and get through different obstacles, like some bar that is spinning around [gesture “spinning”] in a circle and somehow you have to jump over it. If you manage to jump over the spinning bar, you go on to the next obstacle, but if not, you typically get knocked off and fall into some body of water and get soaked. What fun, no?! Have any of you seen these types of shows? What do you think of them?* Continue the discussion until all target words have been presented and defined.

**Step 2.** Show pictures (at the front of the class) that depict segments of the show or are related to the show in order to depict and reuse all of the target vocabulary. For example: *This next picture really makes me cringe. This guy crashes into a padded spinning bar, gets knocked off into the water, gets completely soaked, and you can see that his helmet kind of starts to fall off when he splashes into the water. I really question whether he was injured in this scene. I know that he has a helmet, that the bar is padded, and that he falls into water as opposed to hitting the ground, but when you crash or wipe out like this, I just think that it is pretty easy to get injured. What do you think?*

**Step 3.** Tell students that you are going to review vocabulary related to the topic before doing some other related activities. Give each student a sheet of paper with a matching quiz on Side 1 and a “production” quiz on Side 2. Have students complete Side 1 first. To do so, they should draw lines to match target vocabulary with definitions. After students have completed Side 1, go over it as a class and provide the answers. Then have students turn the sheet over. On Side 2, students read definitions of the target words and attempt to write the form of each target word on their own. After all students have completed Side 2, go over it as a class. Do not grade the quiz.

**Step 4.** Ask students to work in pairs to discuss whether they have seen obstacle course shows in their own country or anywhere else and what they think of them. Also ask them to try to describe one of the obstacle courses they have seen, if they have seen any, and to try to discern whether there are any differences between the obstacle course shows that are shown in different countries.

**Step 5.** Have a class discussion about obstacle course shows in different countries. Write on the board any new vocabulary that comes up during the discussion, and explain the terms to the students. Ask them to give their opinions about what the obstacle course shows have to say about society today and any cultural differences related to how the shows are enacted in different countries. Note that in Japan there is an obstacle course show called *Sasuke*. Ask if any students have seen this show and how it might be different from the various versions of *Wipe Out* in the English-speaking world. After the discussion has finished, tell students that in the next class they will have a graded quiz on the target words that they practiced in the other quiz today (from Step 3).

**Step 6.** At the beginning of the next class, administer the quiz to the class (only the Side 2 version from Step 3 in which they have to produce the target word forms).

**Step 7.** In groups of three, ask students to design an obstacle course with five different obstacles. Each group should explain their obstacle course to the rest of the class. As new vocabulary arises, write it on the board and define it.

**Step 8.** Show a list of the target vocabulary at the front of the class and initiate a discussion about alternative meanings and usage of the target words and phrases. Many of the alternative meanings that arise may be specific to English and not shared in the students’ L1(s). For example: Consider the term wipe out. This can mean to crash, but we also can say that the hard drive on a computer was wiped out by a computer virus. In other words, the virus destroyed the hard drive. To spin means literally to move around in a circular motion, but in politics to spin can mean to try to put a good face on something. For example, if a politician does something wrong, supporters of the politician may try to put a spin on it or just spin it so that it doesn’t seem so bad.

## Commentary

This sample lesson demonstrates how target vocabulary can be presented in the input in a repeated manner while focusing the larger discussion on meaning. Steps 1 and 2 provide good examples of this for the target vocabulary *obstacle course* and *to wipe out*. All items in the checklist can be checked for this lesson as well. Consider the following with regard to the seven items on the checklist:

✓ **1. I decided on target vocabulary and materials needed for the activities.**

The target vocabulary is defined at the beginning. In this case the target words and phrases lend themselves well to focusing on the topic selected. The materials needed are defined in the steps: pictures of scenes from *Wipe Out*, a way to present them at the front of the class, and a blackboard.

✓ **2. I designed the activities to be meaningful, educational, and interactive.**

The topic should be of interest to students, and the activities are clearly interactive because they ask for student opinions, small-group work, and creativity on the part of the students (with the design of the obstacle course in Step 7).

✓ **3. I included cultural and historical information when appropriate.** The rise of obstacle course shows in itself is of interest with regard to the history of television, and the lesson is designed so that students will consider cultural differences related to how such shows are instantiated in different countries. Step 5 addresses these issues directly and even includes specific mention of an obstacle course show in a non-English-speaking country—the show *Sasuke* in Japan.

✓ **4. I made sure target vocabulary is presented repeatedly in the input first.** Steps 1 and 2 clearly demonstrate this item. Although the sample input provided does not tackle all of the target words, following the sample should lead to at least more than one repetition of each target word during the first two steps of the lesson.

✓ **5. I increased the difficulty of tasks involving target vocabulary gradually over time.** Imagine the difficulty that students might experience in working with the target vocabulary had Step 7 come first in this lesson. This would have violated Principle 7 of the IBI approach. Instead, the activities were designed to begin with the presentation of the target vocabulary as input in a manner that allows learners to process the target word forms and their meanings first before being asked to do more with the words. Then, gradually, they are asked to do more over time, leading up to a final activity that requires them to be creative and produce a substantial amount of output (with access to meaning).

✓ **6. I incorporated a number of the principles of the IBI approach.** This lesson is consistent with the principles of the IBI approach. It is both input based and incremental. It is meaning oriented from the beginning but gradually increases demands on the learners in terms of semantic elaboration and output,



respecting the learning burden that students face as well as their limited processing resources. Students cannot do everything all at once when it comes to the target vocabulary, but by the end of the lesson they should be able to do much more because the lesson has been designed to help them increase their vocabulary knowledge in an incremental manner. Whereas one might think Step 4 is not consistent with Principle 7 regarding limiting semantic elaboration during the early stages, note that this step comes after learners have numerous opportunities to process the target words as input. It is not that semantic elaboration should never take place; it is that if it takes place too soon, it can detract from word form learning. Step 8 also demonstrates an initial effort to focus on an expanded number of L2-specific meanings and usage.

✓ **7. I included directly applicable research findings.** One directly applicable research finding incorporated in this lesson is the positive effect of providing learners with opportunities to retrieve target words. If it is possible to include video with audio segments that have other individuals (besides the instructor) producing some or all of the target vocabulary, this would incorporate another directly applicable research finding: the positive effects of talker variability on vocabulary learning.

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## CREATE YOUR OWN VOCABULARY LESSON

Now that you have read the sample lesson and related commentary, try to create your own IBI lesson, making sure that you can check off all of the seven items on the checklist discussed in this chapter.

**Target Words:** *apron, charcoal, grill, knob, laid back, mosquito net, playground, rare, side dish, teeter totter, to be a hit, to billow (smoke), to burn to a crisp, to drizzle, to season, to sizzle, tongs, toppings, utensils, well done*

### Guidelines for Your Vocabulary Lesson

1. Select a title for the lesson.
2. Include seven to nine steps for the lesson. Write them on a separate sheet of paper.
3. Complete the checklist discussed in this chapter, and if you feel that one item needs to be attended to further at any point, go back and modify the lesson so as to incorporate that item more.
4. Write a commentary for the lesson explaining how you addressed each item in the checklist in designing the lesson.



## **A Few Points to Consider About Your Vocabulary Lesson**

Clearly, the particular set of vocabulary at hand lends itself well to a theme related to grilling or a group picnic of some sort, although not all of the target vocabulary is from the same semantic set, which could lead to confusion and less effective L2 vocabulary learning (Finkbeiner & Nicol, 2003; Tinkham, 1997). Pictures, video, or a combination of both could be a good way to present the target vocabulary in the input during the initial steps of the lesson. The topic of grilling and picnics can be addressed from a variety of historical and cultural perspectives as well. For example, is grilling more common in some countries than others? If so, in which countries is it more popular, and why? How is grilling different in different countries of the English-speaking world, such as the United Kingdom, Australia, the United States, and Canada?

In addition to considerations about the content of the lesson, carefully applying the checklist should ensure that the lesson follows the key principles of the IBI approach, including repeated presentation of the vocabulary as input during the early stages and the incremental buildup of vocabulary knowledge over time, including meanings and usage of the vocabulary in English that may differ from those of learners' L1(s). A step can be included to address alternative meanings of the target vocabulary directly, such as explaining the difference between the use of *to drizzle* when referring to the weather (*It is drizzling out*) as opposed to when it is used with a direct object (*He drizzled syrup on the waffle*).

Finally, if the topic of grilling or picnics is selected, it may work well to design the lesson so that it builds up to a group or all-class activity. After the target words have been learned and the topic has been discussed sufficiently, you may ask students to work together to plan a group picnic or an afternoon of grilling, including details such as when and where it would take place, all of the items that they would need, and different activities that they would want to plan (volleyball, another sport, etc.). Activities of this nature should help students improve their ability to use the target vocabulary in a more fluent and natural manner.