

# The Five Essential Components in Building a Successful Language Course

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**Abstract:** In Japanese university classrooms, language instruction is often weighted towards text-based, grammatical instruction. In contrast to this, this paper examines current research in second language acquisition to identify five key components instrumental in constructing a successful language course: input, output, focus on form, fluency, and motivation. It illustrates the importance of each in the EFL classroom, giving concrete examples not only of their implementation but the ways in which these diverse strands act together to promote student competency. Finally, the paper concludes with a pedagogical demonstration of how the components can be effectively integrated into language classrooms. It provides a sample lesson plan as well as additional activities that illustrate how to effectively incorporate these components.

**Keywords:** EFL/ESL course design, input, output, focus on form, fluency, motivation

## 要約

一般的に日本の大学における語学教育は、テキストを使い文法に重きをおいた講義が主流である。しかし、本論文では、第二言語習得に関する最新の研究について検討し、語学学習を成功に導くための5つの主要要素—インプット（リスニング・リーディング）、アウトプット（スピーキング・ライティング）、文法、流暢な言語使用、学習者の動機づけ—を特定し考察することを目的としている。それぞれが、外国語としての英語学習（EFL）にとっていかに大切なものであるか、実践例の紹介だけでなく、上記5つの要素が各々の特徴を生かしながら相互に機能し、学習者の語学能力向上に多大な役割を果たしていることを、明確な実例を示しながら明らかにしていきたい。結論として、語学教育の現場において、いかに上記の要素が授業の中に効果的に盛り込まれ、その役割を果たすことができるかという実践例を、サンプルレッスン教案を含めて提示したい。

## Introduction

Research in second language acquisition (SLA) (Laufer, Meara and Nation, 2005; Dörnyei, 2001; Beglar 2009) collectively identifies five major components that are essential to the success of any language course: input, output, focus on form, fluency, and motivation. Nation (2005) suggests that the design of any well-rounded language course should contain an even balance of four major strands: meaning-focused input, language-focused learning, meaning-focused output, and fluency development, with about 25% of class time devoted to each strand. Dörnyei (2001) advocates motivation as the single most important factor in determining the success or failure of a learner regardless of their language aptitude. Based on the above theories, Beglar (2009) argues that all five of these components are in fact integral to the success of any language course. This paper thoroughly

examines these five, strongly connected components and provides an example lesson plan that demonstrates how to implement these components effectively. Furthermore, it suggests additional activities that teachers can adopt as alternatives to the ones outlined in the lesson plan.

## **The Five Components of a Successful Language Course**

### **1. Learning through meaning-focused input**

The meaning-focused input strand of a language course develops learners' receptive skills through listening and reading. Nation (2013) contends that learning takes place when the learner's attention is centered on the ideas and messages conveyed by the material. Applying the rule above, teachers should dedicate a quarter of each course to this strand – this section offers a practical framework for achieving this target.

#### ***Provide as much comprehensible input as possible***

Most researchers agree that a large amount of meaningful comprehensible input is a vital element in learning a foreign language (Krashen, 1985; Terrell, 1982; Long, 1996; Nation, 2007). As described in Krashen's *Input Hypothesis* (1985, p.2), language learners acquire language by understanding messages or receiving 'comprehensible input'. Learners move from  $i$ , their current level, to  $i + 1$ , the next level by understanding input containing  $i + 1$ . Similarly, Long asserts in his *Interaction Hypothesis* (1996) that comprehensible input is important, especially when learners have a chance to negotiate its meaning.

In order for materials to be comprehensible, research suggests that learners need to be given reading and listening texts in which they know 95–98% of the words. Laufer (1989) posits that 95% coverage, or knowledge of 95% of word tokens, is essential for learners to be able to read a text without the aid of dictionaries, whereas Hu and Nation's research (2000) shows that 98% coverage is needed for learners to gain 'unassisted comprehension' of a text and to be able to read for pleasure.

#### ***Provide opportunities for repetition***

Studies have shown that second language learning (L2) can occur incidentally through comprehensible meaning-focused input (Day, Omura, and Hiramatsu, 1991; Hulstijn, 1992; Waring and Takaki, 2003), however, the rate at which this happens varies drastically. In an early study on the number of encounters needed to learn a word, Saragi, Nation and Meister (1978) found that a word must be encountered a minimum of 6 times for there to be a chance of learning it. Subsequent studies revealed that anywhere from 6–20 encounters are needed (Nation, 1982; Herman, Anderson, Pearson and Nagy, 1987; Rott, 1999; Nation, 2001; Waring and Takaki, 2003). From this research, it is evident that learners need to be given large quantities of input in order to get sufficient repetition of lexical items and grammatical forms.

To give learners the opportunity to acquire the language incidentally, Laufer, Meara and Nation (2005) suggest that learners should read at least one graded reader every two weeks. Day and Bamford (2002) recommend that learners set a goal of one simplified reader per week when designing extensive reading programs.

### ***Monitor the cognitive load***

Teachers need to take into account the cognitive load of the listening and reading texts and input tasks that learners will encounter (Rost, 2002), and ensure that it is not too heavy. In order to successfully do this, teachers should:

1. Give learners time to prepare, thus minimizing the amount of bottom-up processing. Most problems for L2 learners are caused by trying to process the second-language sound system, lexis, or morpho-syntax (Beglar, 2009).
2. Make sure cognitive task demands are low by simplifying the text and/or the task (for example, reducing the length).
3. Lighten the learners' cognitive load (for example, put grammar or vocabulary on the board or in a glossary and/or use pictures).
4. Provide learners with appropriate formulaic expressions so they have the chance to negotiate the language.
5. Help reduce learner anxiety and promote interaction by putting students in pairs or small groups.

### ***Provide interesting and engaging material***

If learners are interested in the material they are more likely to want to understand it. They will find it much easier to process the large amounts of input presented to them if they find it interesting and engaging. In Elley's (1989) study of learning language through listening to stories, he found that learners had limited vocabulary gains when they listened to a story that lacked familiarity, humor, or excitement, but had significant gains when listening to stories that included those elements. Stories that lacked those attributes failed to arouse the attention and engagement of learners, and therefore ultimately restricted acquisition. Teachers should try to choose or design materials that elicit interest in order to give learners the best chance to learn.

### ***Develop familiarity of different discourse types***

Listening and reading material should be authentic and consist of a broad range of genres and discourse types (for example, static, concrete, dynamic, abstract) that learners are likely to meet when learning the new language (Rost, 2005). Learners need to practice recognizing the features of the various types of language and understand when they are most commonly used.

*Teachers are able to facilitate meaning-focused input through the following techniques:*

<b>Skill</b>	<b>Activities</b>
Reading	Extensive reading, self-selected reading, sustained silent reading, paired reading, gap-fill activities.
Listening	Communicative activities (conversations), watching TV or movies, gap-fill and receptive information transfer activities.

## **2. Learning through meaning-focused output**

Meaning-focused output is centered on learners developing their productive skills through speaking and writing. As described by Lee and VanPatten (2003), structured output activities should directly follow structured input activities. The following tactics can assist the teacher in dedicating 25% of the course to meaning-focused output.

### ***Connect input and output tasks***

Learners need to be given the opportunity to produce meaningful output and authentic interaction while receiving meaningful input. Long posits in his Interaction Hypothesis (1996) that the best kind of input for L2 learners is interactionally modified comprehensible input, adjusted by the interlocutors after receiving some signal that their partner needs help to fully understand the message. This (often) two-way process of making meaning more comprehensible for both interlocutors forces them to modify their utterances in ways (for example, clarification requests, confirmation checks, comprehension checks) that not only increase the comprehensibility of the message but also highlight the usage of certain L2 forms. Providing such tasks:

1. can encourage more input as a result of the output.
2. enhances the development of accuracy by forcing the learner to focus on syntactic processing.
3. helps learners to develop a personal voice.
4. helps to automatize pre-existing knowledge.
5. serves as a tool to interact with others.

### ***Push meaningful communication***

Swain's Output Hypothesis Theory (1985) argues that the act of producing meaningful output plays a major part in the process of second language learning. She states that pushing learners to produce the target language may be the trigger that forces them to pay attention to the means of expression needed to successfully convey their intended meaning. When producing language, learners are able to notice items in input that they were not aware of before, thus pushing learners to process language more deeply. Having noticed a gap in knowledge during output, learners may intentionally seek to fill the gap through outside sources such as teachers, peers, or dictionaries.

### ***Use interesting material and give learners the autonomy to choose topics***

It is important for administrators and teachers alike to make the curriculum and course materials relevant to the learners. Dörnyei (2001, p. 63) emphasizes that 'learners will not be motivated to learn unless they regard the material they are taught as worth learning.' He argues that learners need to be involved in the design of the curriculum and educators need to incorporate their needs, goals and interests as much as possible. According to Beglar (2009), interesting topics and teaching materials encourage communicative intent, or the desire or need to use the target language. Relating speaking and writing topics to the everyday experiences and backgrounds of the learners will encourage output.

### ***Give planned and unplanned opportunities to produce language***

Teachers need to provide opportunities to produce both planned and unplanned output. As discussed later in this paper, planned output encourages learners to focus on the form of the target language, whereas unplanned output provides opportunities to learn incidentally.

### ***Encourage the use of different discourse types***

Teachers should design speaking and writing activities to promote the use of the various genres and discourse types found in the L2. Learners need to be able to differentiate the features of each discourse type and practice how to properly use them.

*Teachers are able to facilitate meaning-focused output through the following techniques:*

<b>Skill</b>	<b>Activities</b>
Speaking	Problem-solving discussion, prepared talks and speeches (for example, show and tell), pair conversation, linked skills (speaking and listening), issue logs
Writing	Writing with feedback, information transfer, linked skills (writing and reading), issue logs

### **3. Focusing on form**

Focus on form or language-focused learning is a fundamental aspect of language teaching and is particularly concerned with the internalization of linguistic structures. Long and Robinson state that "it often consists of an occasional shift of attention to linguistic code features – by the teacher and/or one or more students – triggered by perceived problems with comprehension or production" (1998, p.23). As with the input and output components, one-quarter of the language course should be devoted to focusing on form (language-focused learning), and this can be achieved using the following methods.

### ***Focus on form in a variety of ways***

Form-focused instruction is viewed as a particularly effective technique to draw learner attention to linguistic form (Ellis, 2001). Teachers can present grammar structures or functions by using a combination of inductive and deductive approaches. An inductive approach to grammar teaching encourages noticing, while a deductive approach seeks to establish an awareness of the grammar rule (Ellis, 2005).

The more traditional style of teaching grammar, the deductive approach, teaches rules or structures to the students first. By decontextualizing grammatical features and lexical items, form-focused instruction is effective for teacher-centered grammar instruction or teaching high-frequency vocabulary items to beginners and learners whose insufficient grammar or vocabulary knowledge hinders their receptive skills. Direct teaching can compliment incidental learning of the same words and grammar. It can raise learners' awareness of particular items so that they notice them as they meet them while reading (Nation, 2001).

The inductive approach provides students opportunities to learn the grammatical structures through practice of the language in context, and later notice the rules from practical examples.

### ***Provide clear and memorable examples of the target grammar***

The examples for each grammar point should be interesting or relevant, thus standing out to the learner. In addition, the examples should be clear and written in natural English.

### ***Promote meaningful opportunities to use the forms***

Teachers need to provide learners with the chance to develop their knowledge of the language through speaking and writing activities where their main attention is focused on the information they are trying to convey (Nation, 2001). As shown by Beglar (2009), creating opportunities for meaningful output of the forms is important since it:

1. improves accuracy of language use.
2. acts as a means of expression.
3. helps to develop automaticity of pre-existing knowledge.
4. promotes interaction.

### ***Repeat and recycle the forms***

As previously discussed in section 1, repetition is imperative for learning grammatical structures. As with lexical items, there is a great deal to know about grammatical structures. Several occurrences are needed in order for grammatical structures to be fluently accessed and accurately used. Repetition adds to the quality of knowledge and the quantity or strength of this knowledge (Nation, 2001). Grammar structures should also be recycled across the units of the textbook or course to optimize the



number of occurrences and the chance the learner has to learn the item. Opportunities for learners to review the target grammar in review units can be of great benefit as well.

***Connect focus on form to output by promoting interaction***

As described by Beglar (2009), it is important to allow students to control topics and content, and also promote the use of phrases for negotiation of meaning in pairs and groups. In a study by Newton (1995), items that are negotiated are much more likely to be remembered compared to items that are not negotiated.

***Teach formulaic language***

As identified in Levelt’s production model (1999), learners frequently experience breakdowns. Teachers need to teach learners strategies to promote independent study and to help them deal with these breakdowns. Providing the students with formulaic expressions encourages them to negotiate unclear and confusing aspects of the interaction to make it more comprehensible. These expressions can be used to encourage greater participation, motivation, and engagement.

***Provide personalized contexts to use the forms***

Similar to providing students with an opportunity for interaction, providing personalized contexts to use the form allows students to control topics and content. Furthermore, Dörnyei (2001) suggests that promoting interaction, cooperation, and the sharing of genuine personal information among the learners will increase student motivation.

***Teachers are able to facilitate focus on form (language-focused learning) through the following techniques:***

<b>Skill</b>	<b>Activities</b>
Reading	Intensive reading activities, including reading cloze, skimming, scanning, putting sentences or paragraphs into the correct order
Listening	Intensive listening activities, including dictation, listening cloze, word recognition tasks
Speaking	Same or different (pronunciation), identifying (pronunciation), formulaic speech
Writing	Checking for errors (peer and teacher feedback), substitution tables, putting sentences or paragraphs into the correct order

#### **4. Developing fluency**

The fluency development strand of a language course should involve reading, writing, speaking and listening. Learners should not encounter any new lexical items or grammar forms and the content should be largely familiar to them. This strand should consist of activities where learners can become more fluent with what they already know (Laufer, Meara and Nation, 2005). They should not be constrained by any pre-set questions or tasks, and material should be at the learners' level ( $i=1$ ) or below ( $i-1$ ). Teachers should devote one-quarter of the course to this fourth and final strand, and the following guidelines can help them achieve this.

##### ***Maximize the amount and speed of processing***

Nation (2013, p. 36) identifies the goal of fluency as “not to make learners use the language at faster than normal speeds but to use the language at a speed which approaches that of native speakers.” To achieve this he suggests targets of 150 words-per-minute for speaking and 200 words-per-minute for reading.

##### ***Do not assess the language but maximize the amount of processing***

Learners should be given the opportunity to process and freely use extensive amounts of language that they are already familiar with. They should not need to use dictionaries and should be able to use the language without any correction. The focus should be on the flow of language and the number of words encountered and/or produced within a specific period, regardless of spelling, grammar and content (Fellner and Apple, 2006; Brown, 1994).

##### ***Apply pressure***

The teacher should apply pressure to help the students improve fluency development and automaticity.

In the 4/3/2 technique the students prepare a four-minute talk and repeat it three times to different classmates: first in 4 minutes, then in 3 minutes and finally in 2 minutes. The students are pushed to produce meaningful output at an increasing rate of speed. Nation (1989) found that the number of hesitations decreased and grammar accuracy and complexity of sentences increased when teachers applied pressure and had learners retell stories using the 4/3/2 technique. Laufer et al (2005) suggest techniques such as 4/3/2 for speaking, as well as speed-reading, ten-minute writing, and listening to easy stories, to help improve fluency.

While applying pressure, teachers must be careful to monitor learners' output to ensure that they do not fossilize any incorrect forms. They should be on the lookout for any commonly made errors in speaking or writing activities and possibly take up these errors at the end of the lesson or beginning of the next class by writing the incorrect statements on the board and having the learners try to correct



them in pairs or small groups.

***Assist fluency development***

Research using the 4/3/2 technique suggests that assisted fluency activities are more effective than unassisted ones (Kuhn and Stahl, 2003).

Another assisted task effective in increasing fluency is shadowing, in which students talk along at the same pace as a native speaker or a recording of a short speech recorded by the native speaker. Shadowing can be used to increase the strength of formulaic sequences (chunking) resulting in faster access to them in subsequent speaking and writing tasks.

***Use the same form in different contexts***

In fluency development, teachers should give learners frequent repeated practice across all skills and in different contexts for them to be able to automatize the target language.

***Provide meaningful tasks***

As with the other strands, teachers need to select material that is meaningful to the learners so they can focus more effectively on receiving meaning in listening and reading activities and conveying meaning in writing and speaking activities.

***Teachers are able to facilitate fluency development of productive skills through the following techniques:***

Skill	Activities
Speaking	4/3/2 technique, recording and listening to speech, rehearsed talks, shadowing
Writing	Blogs, journals, diaries, continuous writing (10-minute writings), story writing, letter writing

***Teachers are able to facilitate fluency development of receptive skills through the following techniques:***

Skill	Activities
Reading	Extensive reading ( $i=1, i-1$ ), repeated reading, speed reading, rate build-up reading, skimming and scanning, shadowing
Listening	Extensive listening ( $i=1, i-1$ ) (for example, listening to easy stories), repeated listening, 4/3/2 technique, shadowing

## **5. Motivating learners**

Although Nation (2005) did not include motivation when developing the four strands of an effective language course, the author believes that it plays a large role in SLA and in agreement with Beglar (2009) includes it as the fifth component of a successful EFL or ESL course.

Several researchers contend that motivation plays the single most important role in determining the success or failure of a learner in any learning situation (Gardner and Lambert, 1972; Gardner, 1985; Dörnyei, 2001). Dörnyei adds that from his experience, highly motivated language learners “will be able to master a reasonable working knowledge...regardless of their language aptitude” (2001, p. 2). The following tactics can help enable teachers to foster students’ motivation throughout the entirety of the language course.

### ***Promote autonomy***

Learners need to be encouraged to take charge of learning by setting personal goals and utilizing learning strategies (Brown, 2007). Dickenson (1995, pp.173–174) posits that “enhanced motivation is conditional on learners taking responsibility for their own learning...their own learning successes and failures are to be attributed to their own efforts and strategies rather than to factors outside their control”. According to Dörnyei (2001), teachers can promote autonomy by:

1. allowing learners to make as many choices as possible regarding the learning process;
2. handing over as many leaderships and teaching roles to the learners as possible; and
3. adopting the role of a facilitator.

### ***Motivate learners intrinsically***

Classroom techniques have a greater success if they are intrinsically motivating and self-rewarding. Teachers need to foster intrinsic motivation through tasks that are fun, interesting, relevant, and challenging to students.

### ***Stimulate learning through interesting tasks***

Dörnyei (2001, pp.75-77) illustrates how materials are most effective when the tasks are attractive to learners. Teachers can inspire learning by making tasks challenging (e.g., puzzle), interactive (e.g., jigsaw activity), personalized (e.g., show and tell), exotic (e.g., different cultures), competitive (e.g., games) or humorous (e.g., cartoons). Teachers should develop a variety of tasks throughout the course to maintain a high level of interest in the material.

### ***Create community and promote interaction***

According to Dörnyei (1997), building community or group cohesiveness is one of the most important features of a successful communicative language class as it promotes interaction and

encourages students to help one another. When learners have a sense of belonging in the classroom, anxiety levels will decrease and their willingness to participate and communicate and help each other will increase.

### ***Get to know your students***

Teachers should get to know their students and tailor their instruction to match their strengths, weaknesses and interests. By showing personal interest in them through one-on-one teacher–student interaction, teachers will be able to better assess the learners’ individual needs and abilities. Developing a personal relationship with them will help motivate them to learn and actively participate in activities.

### ***Sample lesson plan implementing the five components of a successful language course***

Having illustrated the five connected components, the author will provide an example lesson plan using a number of the activities previously mentioned in order to clearly demonstrate how to implement these components effectively.

### ***Lesson plan for giving more information and asking follow-up questions***

\*Please note that this is the 2<sup>nd</sup> lesson of the first semester. In the previous lesson, the students were introduced to the course outline, made name cards, did an activity using formulaic expressions, and participated in ice-breaker activities to get to know one another.

***Students:*** approximately twenty-five 1<sup>st</sup>-year university students.

***Course title:*** Communication Strategies 1

***Course description:*** This class is designed to introduce students to spoken English. It will focus on students' active participation in pronunciation, speaking, listening, and beginning conversations.

***Level:*** False beginner/pre-intermediate students, 150-250 TOEIC score.

***Objectives*** (Linguistic and Affective):

The students will be able to:

- practice and recycle high-frequency vocabulary items selected from the New General Service List (NGSL) and/or learned in previous lessons
- use formulaic expressions to negotiate meaning of any unclear or confusing aspects of the communication

- form referential and “open” questions in the past tense
- ask follow-up questions to get more information and to keep the conversation going
- respond to questions about themselves and give more information
- discuss in detail some of their own recent past experiences
- use “open” questions to find out desired information about their classmates’ recent past experiences.

***Length of lesson:*** 90 minutes

***Description of lesson:*** This lesson will focus mainly on the students forming and answering open questions. Based on the author’s teaching experience in Japan, this is a skill that low- to intermediate-level students are generally quite poor at.

***Procedure (see table 1 for an overview of the lesson plan and timing):***

1. Greet students, put them in groups of 3–4 and play the vocabulary card game: Slap Down (Sheridan & Markslag, 2014) (see Appendix 1)
2. Have the students open their notebook and prepare for a dictation. Read three simple past statements and have the students write them in their books. Encourage students to use the formulaic expressions written on the back of the name card (see Appendix 2) if they do not understand what the teacher is saying. Read the first statement extremely fast, the second one very quietly and the third one quietly and mumbled so the students are forced to use the formulaic expressions.
  - a. I went to USJ.
  - b. My friend and I studied English.
  - c. I went to Torikizoku.

Have the students quickly compare their answers to the dictation in groups of three or four. After taking up the answers by writing them on the board (or having three students write them on the board), have the students work together in their groups to see how many follow-up questions they can come up with for the three statements from the dictation. Try to turn this into a mini competition between the groups. After five minutes ask each group how many questions they came up with. Elicit some of the follow-up questions from the groups, starting with the winning group. Make any appropriate corrections and write some of them on the board.

3. Hand out the “Follow-up questions & giving more information” worksheet (see Appendix 3) to the students. Have the students record the first simple past statement, “I went to USJ,” from part two under the headings “Who,” “What,” and “Where” on the worksheet. After each student has written the first statement, get the students to ask the teacher “What did you

do on the weekend?” The teacher will answer “I went to USJ.” Then have the students use the follow-up questions written at the top of the worksheet (and possibly also written on the board): How did you get there? Where did you go? When did you go? Who did you go with? Why did you go? etc. to elicit more information. Start expanding the short statement “I went to USJ” as the students ask more and more follow-up questions until you have a long sentence. Get the students to record the sentence and show them how the sentence can be broken up into individual parts (who, what, when, how, why etc.) Do the same for the second and third statement. Have the students write one sentence about what they did last weekend on the fourth line of the Forming questions and giving more information worksheet. After a few minutes, prepare the class for step 4 by modeling the activity with a couple of students. Ask a student what they did on the weekend. Then ask follow-up questions to get more information and write that information on a blank line of the worksheet.

**Example (Model Conversation):**

Teacher: What did you do on the weekend?

Student: I went shopping.

Teacher: How did you get there?

Student: By train.

Teacher: Where did you go? etc.

4. Have each student interview five different students and write the information of the students they interviewed on lines 5–9. Discourage the students from showing one another their worksheets and just copying each other’s information. Encourage the use of formulaic questions to negotiate meaning of any unclear or confusing aspects of the communication.
5. Write some of the commonly made errors during the interview on the board. Have the students work in pairs or small groups of 3–4 to correct them. After correcting the errors as a class, have the students look for similar errors on their worksheets and correct them.
6. Teach simple reported speech patterns (for example: A said that he/she ~ and/or A told me that he/she ~ ) and write them on the board. Tell students that they are going to report on the 5 classmates they previously interviewed in a timed activity. Model the activity by having one student read out all five of the sentences of the students they interviewed.

**Example (Model Conversation):**

Student: I interviewed A. A said that she went shopping by train in Umeda on Sunday with her friend to buy a new skirt.

Student: I interviewed B. B told me that he played soccer in the park near his house on Saturday afternoon with 5 friends because he loves playing sports. etc.

Put students in pairs and push their output using the 4/3/2 technique. Allow each pair four minutes to complete the task the first time (2 minutes each). Have the students change partners and now allow each pair 3 minutes to complete the task the second time (90 seconds each).

Have the students change partners one last time and allow them two minutes to complete the task (1 minute each). Encourage students to try to not read directly from their worksheet, but to make as much eye contact as possible while reporting to their partner.

7. Wrap-up and homework: Collect the worksheets and name cards and explain the homework (5 minutes)

Table 1: Overview of the lesson plan, its components and timing

Time	Activity	Brief Description of Student Activity	Component
20-30 min	Make 10 word cards (homework)	Select 10 unknown words from the New General Service List (NGSL) and make 10 word cards.	Meaning-focused input
			Language-focused learning
			Motivating
20-30 min	Extensive reading (homework)	Read one level-appropriate graded reader and take a short comprehension quiz on mreader.org.	Meaning-focused input
			Fluency development
			Motivating
15 min	1. Greetings and word card activity	In small groups of 3–4, play the vocabulary card game, “ <i>Slap Down</i> ” (Sheridan & Markslag, 2014) (see Appendix 1).	Meaning-focused output
			Meaning-focused input
			Language-focused learning
			Motivating
15 min	2. Dictation using formulaic language	Listen to 3 simple statements and write them in your notebook. Use formulaic language to help with comprehension.	Language-focused learning
			Meaning-focused input
			Motivating
15 min	3. Forming questions and giving more information	Record examples 1, 2 & 3 from the dictation in the appropriate sections of the worksheet (see Appendix 3). Use the question prompts at the top of the worksheet to ask questions to the teacher and record their answers in the appropriate boxes. Create your own sentence by filling out the 4 <sup>th</sup> line of the worksheet.	Language-focused learning
			Meaning-focused output
			Meaning-focused input
			Motivating
20 min	4. Class interview	Interview classmates taking turns asking and answering questions. Record your partner’s answer on the worksheet.	Meaning-focused output
			Meaning-focused input
			Motivating
5 min	5. Error correction	In pairs or small groups of 3–4, correct the commonly made errors written on the board (provided by teacher).	Language-focused learning
			Motivating
15 min	6. 4-3-2 activity using reported speech	Use reported speech to talk about the classmates previously interviewed. Teacher pushes output using the 4-3-2 activity.	Fluency Development
			Meaning-focused output
			Meaning-focused input
			Motivating
5 min	Wrap-up and Homework	1. Write 5 sentences about your week giving more information 2. Make 10 word cards 3. Read one level appropriate graded reader. (homework 60–90 minutes)	Meaning-focused output
			Meaning-focused input
			Fluency development
			Language-focused learning
			Motivating



**Assessment:**

- Collect the students' worksheets at the end of class and correct them by circling any student errors for the next lesson. Take up any common/frequent errors at the beginning of the next class by writing the incorrect statements on the board and have the students try to correct them in pairs or groups of 3–4. After correcting the errors as a class, have the students look for similar errors on their worksheets and correct them.

**Homework:**

1. For homework, ask the students to write five sentences about their week in their notebooks. The students will be asked to record these statements on lines 10–14 of the “Follow-up questions & giving more information” worksheet at the beginning of the next class. These statements will be used in a warm-up/review activity.
2. Students need to make 10 new word cards each week for new words they learned in the lesson or from the New General Service List.
3. Students are also required to read one level-appropriate graded reader and take a short comprehension quiz on [mreader.org](http://mreader.org)

**Materials:**

- Name card which has formulaic expressions written on the back (handed out in the first week) (see appendix 2)
- Follow-up questions and giving more information worksheet (see Appendix 3)
- Student-made vocabulary cards – throughout the lesson students will be instructed/reminded to write down any unknown words on a word card and then complete the word card by writing an example sentence, the Japanese translation, and picture or collocation for homework. The students were also given the NGSL the previous week and instructed on how to make word cards. The students are expected to make at least 10 word cards each week.

**Discussion: Justification of the lesson**

The author believes the design of all lessons should be highly motivating and strongly influenced by the theory put forward by Nation (2005), which proposes that a balanced language course should equally consist of the four major strands: meaning-focused input, language-focused learning, meaning-focused output, and fluency development. This sample lesson plan accomplishes this goal (see Table 2), despite the fact that slightly more time is spent on the language-focused learning strand than the ideal 25%. Since almost all lower proficiency level students in Japan struggle forming questions, it is important to dedicate a little more time focusing on this skill, especially at the beginning of the course. As the academic year progresses, the lessons for this communications course will become more and more balanced to equally account for each of the four strands. And of course it must be remembered that the 25% ratio is a guide, not a hard-and-fast rule.

Table 2: How the five components are integrated into the lesson

<b>The Five Components</b>	<b>1. Slap Down activity</b>	<b>2. Dictation</b>	<b>3. Forming questions</b>	<b>4. Interview</b>	<b>5. Error correction</b>	<b>6. 4/3/2 activity</b>	<b>1. Giving more info.</b>	<b>2. Word cards</b>	<b>3. Extensive reading</b>
<b>Meaning-focused input</b>									
Comprehensible input	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓
Opportunities for repetition	✓		✓	✓		✓		✓	✓
Monitoring the cognitive load	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓
Interesting and engaging material	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓			✓
Different discourse types			✓	✓		✓			✓
<b>Meaning-focused output</b>									
Connected input and output tasks	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Pushed meaningful communication				✓		✓			
Planned/unplanned production	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Different discourse types			✓	✓		✓	✓		
<b>Language-focused learning</b>									
Done in a variety of ways		✓	✓		✓				
Clear and memorable examples	✓	✓	✓		✓			✓	
Meaningful use of forms	✓	✓	✓		✓			✓	
Forms are repeated and recycled	✓	✓	✓					✓	
Connected to output tasks	✓	✓	✓		✓			✓	
Use of formulaic language	✓	✓		✓					
Personalized contexts			✓		✓				
<b>Fluency development</b>									
Maximize the amount and speed						✓			✓
Not assessed						✓	✓		✓
Pressure applied						✓			
Assisted fluency development						✓			
Same forms in different contexts						✓			✓
Meaningful tasks						✓	✓		✓
<b>Motivation</b>									
Autonomous	✓			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Intrinsically motivating	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Interesting	✓	✓		✓			✓		✓
Interactive and community building	✓	✓		✓	✓				
Teacher/student interaction		✓	✓		✓				

As previously illustrated, form-focused instruction is viewed as a particularly useful technique to draw learner attention to linguistic form. Decontextualizing grammatical features in such activities as “*Slap down*,” the *dictation* and *Forming questions and giving more information* makes form-focused instruction particularly effective for teacher-centered grammar instruction and teaching high-frequency vocabulary items to beginners whose insufficient grammar or vocabulary knowledge hinders their receptive skills. This form of direct teaching complements incidental learning of the same words and grammar structures encountered in the weekly *extensive reading* homework assignments. This helps to “raise learners’ awareness of the particular items so that they notice them when they meet them while reading’ (Nation, 2001).

When planning the focus on form tasks in this lesson, several things were taken into consideration:

1. The examples provided to learners need to be clear and salient.
2. The form-focused instruction should be directly connected with the listening or reading task(s).
3. Grammar forms should be recycled
4. Chunks of language should be produced.

Students, especially those who are lower-level learners, need to be given several clear models of what exactly they should do to accomplish each task. This allows the students to focus solely on the target language when they perform the task. Furthermore, they need to be provided with several clear and salient examples as shown in all of the activities and worksheets in this lesson. The students in turn should be able to reproduce the follow-up questions in a variety of situations, especially when discussing past experiences. By the end of the 15-week course, the students should be able to successfully master forming future and present tense questions using similar worksheets and examples.

The *dictation* is also an effective activity for lower-level learners as it forces them to pay attention to specific language. By using their voice the teacher can easily match the speed of the dictation to the proficiency level of the students. Although the dictation might be read relatively slowly, it is important for the teacher to keep the speech authentic and not break the rhythm of the speech.

In the first week, students are given formulaic expressions (chunks) on the back of their name cards to encourage them to take an active approach in their own learning. These questions are recycled in a number of activities in this lesson and throughout the course to provide the students with repetition. As identified in Levelt’s production model (1999), learners frequently experience breakdowns. Instructors need to teach strategies to promote independent study and to help learners deal with these breakdowns. Providing students with these formulaic expressions encourages them to negotiate unclear and confusing aspects of the interaction to make it more comprehensible. These expressions can be used to encourage greater participation, motivation, and engagement.

Students are provided with numerous opportunities to produce meaningful output and authentic

interaction while receiving meaningful input. As proposed by Michael Long in his *Interaction Hypothesis* (1996), the best kind of input for L2 learners is interactionally modified comprehensible input, adjusted by the interlocutors after receiving a signal that their partner needs some help in order to fully understand the message. This two-way process of making meaning more comprehensible for both interlocutors forces them to modify their utterances in ways that not only increase the comprehensibility of the message but also augment the salience of certain L2 forms and make them available to the learner. The output from these tasks can be beneficial in that:

- Output can serve to get more input
- The development of accuracy is enhanced by forcing the learner to focus on syntactic processing
- Learners develop a personal voice
- Pre-existing knowledge becomes automated
- Learners interact meaningfully with each other.

Creating the types of opportunities for output as found in the Forming questions and giving more information activity is an important component of any language course. Learners should have the chance to develop their knowledge of the language through speaking and writing activities where their main attention is focused on the information they are trying to convey (Nation, 2001).

In the fluency development strand of a language course, learners should not encounter any new lexical items or grammar forms. This strand should consist of activities where learners can become more fluent with what they already know (Laufer, Meara, and Nation, 2005). In the *interview* activity, each student will be given the opportunity to answer six questions about the statement they wrote on line 4 of the worksheet five times. They will also be given the opportunity to ask the same five referential questions to five different partners, thus giving them the repetition necessary to develop fluency.

Also in the fluency strand of the course, the teacher should apply pressure to help the students improve fluency and automaticity development. Laufer et al (2005) suggest such techniques as 4/3/2 for speaking, as used in the final activity. Swain (1985) agrees that the teacher needs to push the students' output by restricting the amount of the time spent with each partner. In the final activity, students are allowed the most amount of time with their first partner and the least amount of time with their last.

It is also important for the teacher to monitor students' output skills in order to ensure that they do not fossilize any incorrect forms. In the *error correction* activities both during the lesson and at the start of the next lesson, the teacher draws the students' attention to common errors by writing the incorrect statements on the board, and has the students try to correct them in pairs or groups of 3–4.

Dörnyei identifies motivation as playing an extremely “important role in determining the success or failure in any learning situation” (2001). He adds that highly motivated learners “will be able to master a reasonable working knowledge...regardless of their language aptitude (p. 2).” Based

on this theory, building, maintaining and protecting motivation in learners should be a priority in every activity. Classroom techniques have a greater success if they are intrinsically motivating and self-rewarding – teachers can foster motivation through tasks that are fun, engaging, interactive, interesting, relevant, and/or challenging.

Students should be encouraged to take charge of their own learning by setting personal goals and utilizing learning strategies (Brown, 2007) such as autonomously choosing key vocabulary and creating vocabulary and grammar cards outside of the classroom. Another beneficial strategy, seen in the Forming questions and giving more information activity, uses word parts and parts of speech to help remember words and chunks of language.

## Conclusion

It is apparent that the five major components – input, output, focus on form, fluency and motivation – are essential to the success of any language course. Teachers should carefully develop the curriculum and design tasks to incorporate all of these components in order to provide the most effective learning experience for students. The activities suggested in this paper will help to maintain a high level of student interest in the material and facilitate acquisition of language. Teachers should allocate approximately equal amounts of time to the four strands and foster motivation throughout the course to maximize their students' opportunity to successfully master the L2.

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Appendix 1: Vocabulary Card Game: Slap Down (Adapted from Sheridan & Markslag, 2014)

<b><i>Slap Down</i></b>	<b>Materials:</b> Five to 10 vocabulary cards.
<b>Activity time:</b> 10-15 minutes	<b>Number of students:</b> Groups of 3 or 4
<p><b>Procedure:</b></p> <p><b>Step 1:</b> Put the students in groups of 3 to 4 students. Have each group sit around a desk or table facing one another.</p> <p><b>Step 2:</b> Have each student (from each group) choose 5 cards from their own set of vocabulary cards and put them on the desk in front of them.</p> <p><b>Step 3:</b> Tell the students that they are going to be teachers. They will be responsible for teaching the 5 vocabulary items that they have chosen to the rest of their group. Using the formulaic language on the back of the students' name cards, write the following conversation on the board:</p> <p><b>Student 1:</b> How do you say that word?</p> <p><b>“Teacher:”</b> _____ (EVERYONE REPEAT).</p> <p><b>Student 2:</b> How do you say it in Japanese?</p> <p><b>“Teacher:”</b> _____</p> <p><b>Student 1 or 3:</b> Could you give us an example sentence using <u>“the word?”</u></p> <p><b>“Teacher:”</b> _____</p> <p>Choose a strong group of students to demonstrate the activity with. Select one student from the group to be the first “teacher.” Instruct the student to the right of the “teacher:” “How do you say that word?” Have the “teacher” say the 1<sup>st</sup> vocabulary item they have selected aloud and get the other members of their group to repeat the word. Next, instruct the next student to the right to ask the “teacher:” “How do you say it in Japanese?” Have the “teacher” say the Japanese meaning of the English word. Finally, instruct the next student to the right if the students are in a group of four or the student who asked the first question if the students are in a group of three to ask the “teacher:” Could you give us an example sentence using <u>“the word?”</u> Have the “teacher” say the example sentence, which they have chosen and written on their card. The group should repeat these steps until the first “teacher” has taught all of their words. After the first “teacher” has taught all of their vocabulary cards, choose another student to be the “teacher.” Repeat this process until all of the group members have taught all of their vocabulary cards. Encourage students to also use different formulaic language on the back of their name cards if they do not understand.</p> <p><b>Step 4:</b> Have the students randomly scatter all of their vocabulary cards on the desk with the English side of the card facing up. Get the students to play paper-rock-scissors (<i>janken</i>) to decide the order of the game (clockwise). The first person will say the Japanese meaning of the vocabulary item and the other members will try to be the first to slap the word in English.</p>	
<p><b>Variation:</b> This game can be played with either the English or Japanese side of the vocabulary card face up. When the game is played with the English side of the vocabulary card face up, it tests the students' receptive knowledge. When the game is played with the Japanese side of the vocabulary card face up, it tests the students' productive knowledge.</p>	
<p><b>Conclusion</b></p> <p>This is an excellent warm up and/or review activity testing the students' receptive or productive knowledge of the vocabulary items. It requires little preparation by the teacher and can be done in only ten to 15 minutes.</p>	

Appendix 2: Student name card with formulaic language

Attendance

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15

Could you say that again?	もう一度言って下さい。
Could you please speak more slowly?	もう少しゆっくり言って下さい。
Could you please speak louder?	もう少し大きな声で言って下さい。
How do you spell <u>that</u> ?	それは、どんなスペルですか？
What does <u>this</u> mean?	これは、どういう意味ですか？
Could you write that on the board?	それを黒板に書いて下さい。
Is this correct?	これは正しいですか？
I'm sorry, but I don't understand.	すみません、私はわかりません。
How do you say <u>this</u> in English/Japanese?	それは英語で何と言いますか？
Can you help me please?	手伝って下さい。
How do you say this word?	これはどのように発音するのですか？

Appendix 3: Forming Questions & Giving More Information Worksheet

	Who	What	How	Where	When	With Whom	Why
1	<i>I</i>	<i>went</i>	<i>by car</i>	<i>to USJ</i>	<i>on the weekend</i>	<i>with 10 of my friends</i>	<i>to ride attractions.</i>
2	<i>My friend and I</i>	<i>studied English</i>		<i>in the library</i>	<i>on Friday evening</i>	<i>together</i>	<i>because we had an English test on Monday.</i>
3	<i>I</i>	<i>went</i>	<i>by bicycle</i>	<i>to Torikizoku</i>	<i>on Saturday night</i>	<i>with my family</i>	<i>to eat "tsukune" (ground chicken).</i>
4							
5							
6							
7							
8							
9							
10							
11							
12							