Starting at the End: Assessments as a Guide to Classroom Practice and Learner Autonomy

Jennifer Rice
American English Institute
University of Oregon
What is Washback?

• the influence of testing on teaching & learning
  - Brown (2002)

Goals → Objectives → Assessment → Lessons
Teach **learning strategies** to learners!

- Bartoshesky et al (ND),
http://www.nclrc.org/guides/HED/

1. Metacognitive
   - Organize (Plan before starting.)
   - Manage (Set optimal conditions while working.)
   - Monitor (Are you understanding/understandable?)
   - Evaluate (Were you successful?)

2. Task-based
   - Use what you know (predict, associate, personalize)
   - Use your imagination (create images, act out roles)
   - Use your organizational skills (find patterns, take notes)
   - Use a variety of resources (use dictionary, team work)
Practicing Learner Autonomy

Listing
Ordering / sorting
Comparing / contrasting
Problem solving
Sharing personal experiences
Creative projects

- Willis (1996)
Creating interactive classrooms

extensive group work =>
less student anxiety
more student responsibility / autonomy
more student talk time
real communicative purpose

... prepare learners for life beyond classroom!
- Brown (1994)
# Speaking Skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Objectives – SWBAT...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Speak in English about an academic topic in a non-confrontational way. | I. Maintain eye contact with audience  
II. Ask for clarification when needed  
III. Answer impromptu questions of clarification from audience members  
IV. Express opinions in a polite way  
V. Support opinions with facts  
VI. Use appropriate words from the academic word list  
VII. Pronounce “p”, “b”, “f”, “v”, and “w” correctly within words. |
### My Assessment Choice = 
**Impromptu Discussion Skills Test**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Active Listening</strong></td>
<td>_____</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o</td>
<td>asks for clarification when needed using practiced language stems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o</td>
<td>helps others understand when needed using practiced language stems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Meaningful Production</strong></td>
<td>_____</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o</td>
<td>gives opinions politely using practiced language stems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o</td>
<td>supports opinions with facts using practiced language stems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Clarity</strong></td>
<td>_____</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o</td>
<td>pronounces target sounds (p, b, f, v, &amp; w) clearly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o</td>
<td>maintains eye contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o</td>
<td>uses appropriate target vocabulary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Activities?

In groups, brainstorm what you could do in the classroom to illustrate beneficial washback from this assessment. Remember we want to **build** and **practice** learner autonomy & **create** interactive classrooms.

a. How would you have learners practice?
b. How would you give learners feedback?
c. On which concepts would you dwell? Why?
Possible ideas for activities

- Mock discussion test (w/ peer feedback)
Possible ideas for activities

• Info gap with pronunciation targets

A: I saw a pug yesterday.

B: Pug Bug

A: I watched the vast scenery go by.

B: Fast Vast Past
Possible ideas for activities

- Use cards with language stems in discussions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In my opinion...</th>
<th>As far as I’m concerned...</th>
<th>As I see it...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It seems to me...</td>
<td>I think...</td>
<td>I believe...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I sometimes think...</td>
<td>Do you agree?</td>
<td>I agree with you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’ve heard that...</td>
<td>Don’t you agree?</td>
<td>I couldn’t agree more.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s my feeling that...</td>
<td>Yes, that’s true/right.</td>
<td>What I mean is...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some people think that...</td>
<td>You’re right.</td>
<td>Let me put it another way.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Possible ideas for activities

- **BINGO with language stems / target vocabulary**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>B</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>G</th>
<th>O</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personally, I think...</td>
<td>What do you mean?</td>
<td>One reason is...</td>
<td>So do I.</td>
<td>I know what you mean, but...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In my opinion...</td>
<td>How about you?</td>
<td>What I mean is...</td>
<td>So am I.</td>
<td>A lot of people might agree, but...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maybe...</td>
<td>What do you think?</td>
<td>Another reason is...</td>
<td>I think so, too...</td>
<td>Actually,...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you ask me...</td>
<td>What's your opinion?</td>
<td>What I was trying to say was...</td>
<td>So have I.</td>
<td>I see your point, but...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perhaps...</td>
<td>Do you think ___?</td>
<td>...because...</td>
<td>Me, too...</td>
<td>Well, yeah, but...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
More possible ideas for activities

• Teach new expression to group (for clarification practice)

• Vocabulary practice with “backs to board”

• Use eye contact cards while discussing
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Objectives – SWBAT…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Write in English about an academic topic.</td>
<td>I. Compose a cohesive piece of writing that includes a topic sentence, supporting sentences, a closing sentence and appropriate discourse markers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>II. Format an MS Word document for academic writing by setting a specific font style, font size, and line spacing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>III. Spell correctly with the help of a computer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IV. Use appropriate words from the academic word list</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>V. Use appropriate pronominal references</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### My Assessment Choice =
Timed, typed Compare / Contrast Paragraph

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student followed the formatting rules. (Typed in Arial 12 pt. font, double-spaced, indented)</th>
<th>1 2 3 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student wrote a good topic sentence with a topic &amp; clear focus.</td>
<td>2 4 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student wrote relevant supporting sentences in a logical order.</td>
<td>2 4 6 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student wrote a closing statement that restates the main idea using different words.</td>
<td>2 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students used a variety of appropriate discourse markers.</td>
<td>2 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student used correct spelling.</td>
<td>2 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student used appropriate pronominal references.</td>
<td>2 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| TOTAL | / 34 |
Activities?

In groups, brainstorm what you could do in the classroom to illustrate beneficial washback from this assessment. Remember we want to **build** and **practice** learner autonomy & **create** interactive classrooms.

a. How would you have learners practice?
b. How would you give learners feedback?
c. On which concepts would you dwell? Why?
Possible ideas for activities

• Ordering a paragraph cut into strips in groups

However, children should not start studying English, or any other second language, until they are at least 12 years old for educational and social reasons.

How many people do you know who smoke cigarettes?

In all cultures, people say they smoke cigarettes to relax and because they enjoy them, even though most people know smoking is one of the most dangerous habits.

English is one the most important languages in the world.

Why should you study English?

Many governments have started to worry about the health of their citizens and so have made smoking illegal in public places.

Parents are, therefore, interested in their children learning English well and often spend a lot of money on their children’s education in the language, starting them in private schools at a very young age.

Tobacco has been grown and smoked in many countries for hundreds of years and has become a part of many cultures.

It is used internationally in many different contexts such as politics, tourism and business.

It is acceptable to ask people not to smoke in places of work, but banning smoking in all public places is an invasion of people’s privacy and will cause many businesses to lose money.
Possible ideas for activities

• Marking various concepts in peers’ / own writing

Answer these questions about your partner’s paragraph:

1. Which sentences are topic sentences? Make them **yellow**.
2. Which sentences are main supporting ideas? Make them **green**.
3. Which sentences are details? Make them **blue**.
4. **Box** all the compare & contrast words that you find.
More possible ideas for activities

• Writing a paragraph as a group

• Speed spelling / writing on computers

• Correcting mistakes (order / spelling / formatting / discourse markers) on given electronic documents with partners
References


Brown, J.D. 2002. Extraneous variables and the washback effect. JALT vol. 6 No. 2

Questions?

jar@uoregon.edu

aei.uoregon.edu