

Backwards planning

Putting 'real life' at the heart of teaching

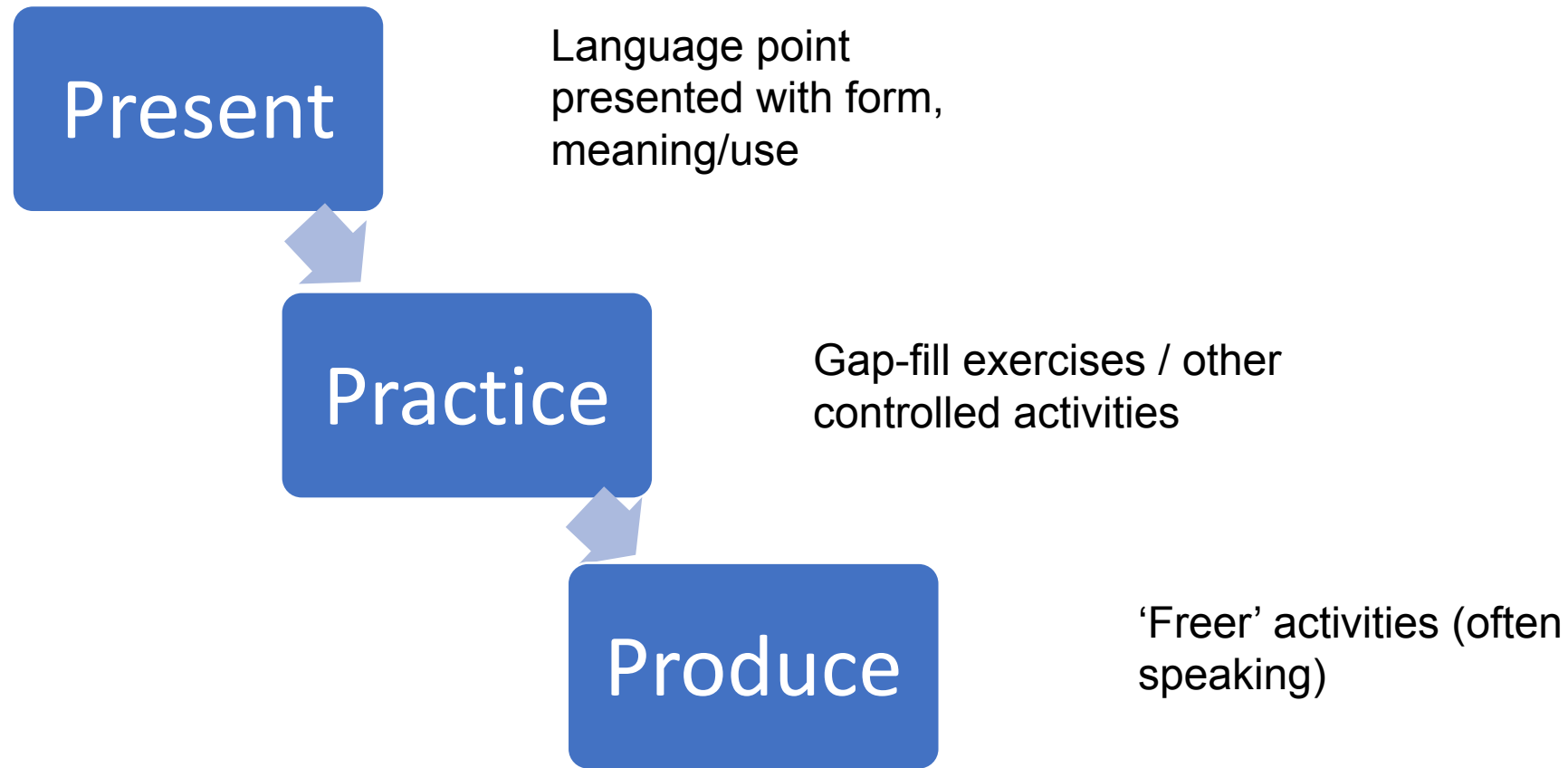


Lesson aims

- Think of a lesson you taught recently.
- Was was/were the aim(s)?



The 'PPP' model – typical in coursebooks and on courses like CELTA



PPP



- Logical sequence of activities
- Provides structure
- A sense of progress



- Learning is not linear
- Breaking down language into neat chunks and teaching them in isolation?

Course book aims



- **Aim 1:** In this lesson, students revise the past simple and continuous and learn to distinguish between action and non-action verbs.
- **Aim 2:** The aim is to revise and practice the main future forms: will, going to, and the present continuous.
- **Aim 3:** By the end of this lesson, students will be able to use the modal verbs should, must, and have to.

Course book aims



- **Aim 1:** In this lesson, students revise the **past simple and continuous** and learn to distinguish between **action and non-action verbs**.
- **Aim 2:** The aim is to revise and practice the **main future forms: will, going to, and the present continuous**.
- **Aim 3:** By the end of this lesson, students will be able to use the **modal verbs should, must, and have to**.

One drawback of 'grammar aims'?

- Final 'freer' task
- Make psychic guesses about your partner using question tags.
E.g. "*You like sports, don't you?*"
- Think of your favourite three celebrities. What do you think *they're doing* right now?

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E.g. "*You like sports, **don't you?***"
- Think of your favourite three celebrities. What do you think ***they're doing*** right now?
- Genuine, 'real life' tasks, or just 'glorified grammar practice'?

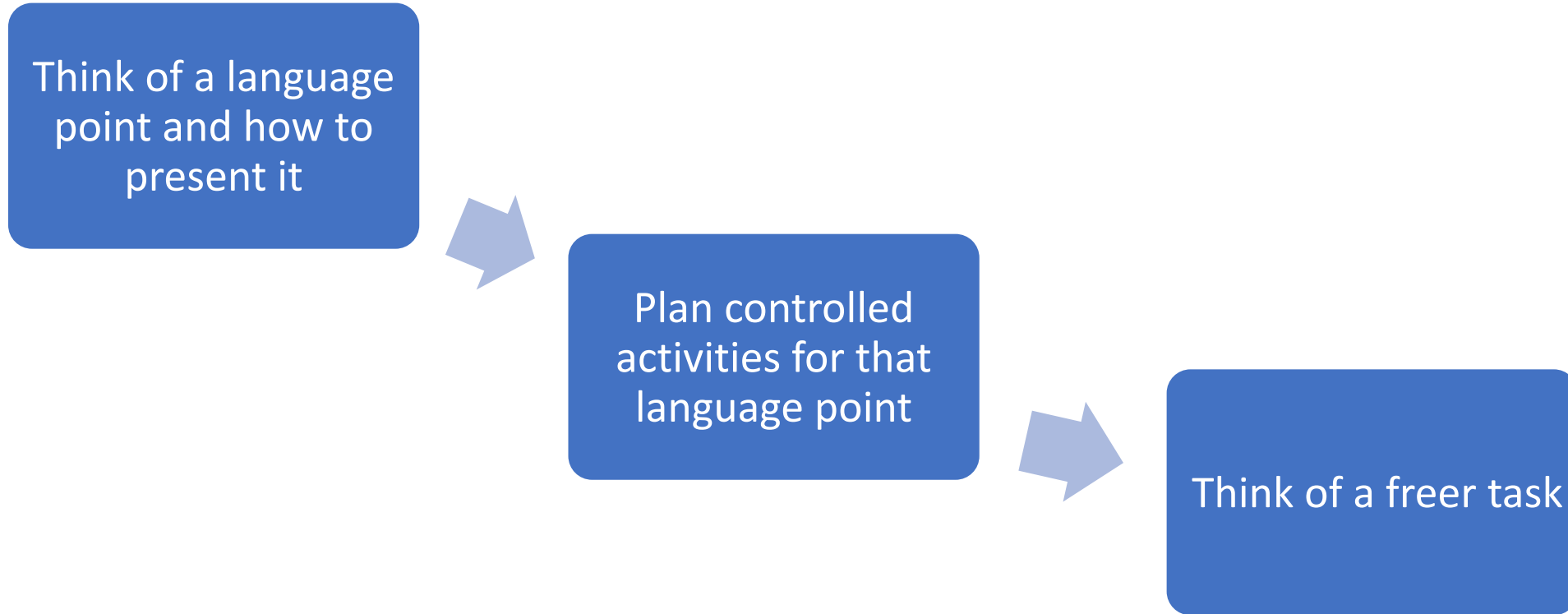
“It is difficult to see how activities can be regarded as truly communicative if the learners’ main objective is not to achieve some outcome through the use of language, but to demonstrate to the teacher their control of the target form.”(Willis, 1990, p.4)

Does the standard PPP approach really help our learners use language in real life?

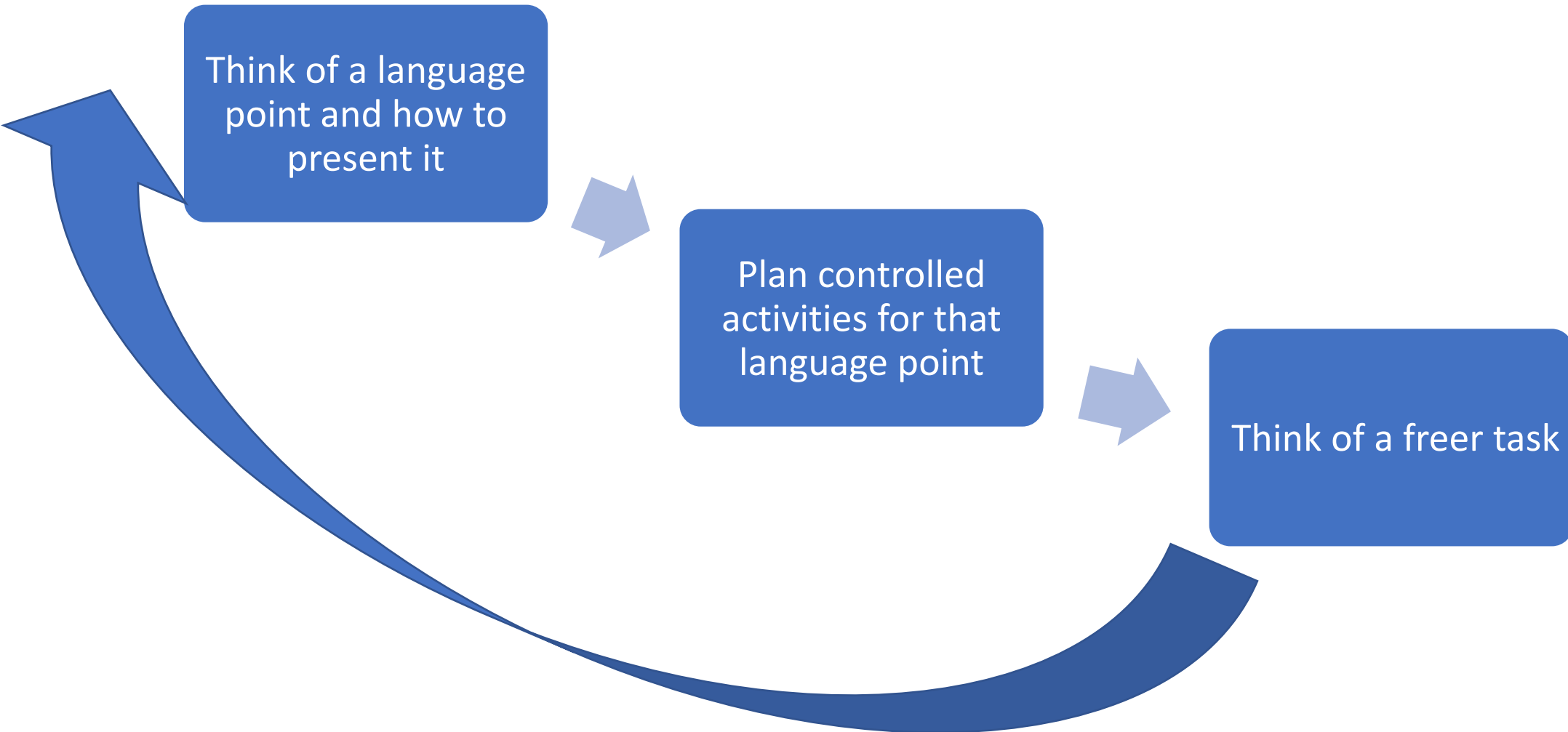
How can we make our lessons more communicative/'real life'/meaningful?

Re-think the standard/PPP approach to planning lessons?

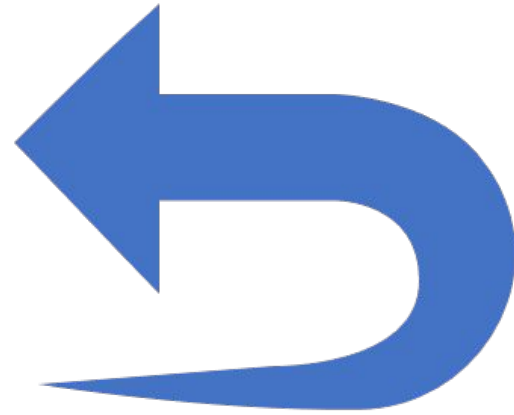
PPP approach to lesson planning



An alternative method of planning



Backwards planning



Backwards planning

- Planning the final task first: easier to make it more meaningful/ communicative /relevant to our learners' real life needs
- Rest of the lesson(s) build(s) up to the final task



Thinking about our lesson aims less in terms of what language we want to teach, and more in terms of what we want our learners to DO by the end of the lesson

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Final destination on a journey





THE END



PPP

The chosen language point
drives the lesson

Backwards planning

A real-life communicative task
drives the lesson

Thinking of a final task

- Needs analysis / ask students directly
- Group of B1/B2-level students, aged 19/20
- Will soon be graduating and looking for jobs in English-speaking countries/companies
- Job interview

Useful final task

- A group of young adults about to study in an English-speaking university
- B2 level
- Need English for academic purposes

- Give an oral presentation in English?
- Write a semi-formal email to a lecturer?
- Present and justify an opinion, either in writing or speech?
- Write an academic report?
- Understand the main arguments in an academic article?
- Follow an academic lecture/talk on a particular subject?

A valuable resource

- CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference)
- Contains several 'can do' statements related to real life language competence
- These are an excellent source of inspiration for real life language tasks and lesson/course aims

Examples of 'can do' statements from the CEFR

- Oral production
 - **Sustained monologue – describing experience (high-B1 descriptor):** Can clearly express feelings about something experienced and give reasons to explain those feelings.
 - **Sustained monologue – giving information (B2 descriptor):** Can give a clear, detailed description of how to carry out a procedure.
- Written production
 - **Reports and essays (C1 descriptor):** Can expand and support points of view at some length with subsidiary points, reasons and relevant examples.
- Reading comprehension
 - **Reading for orientation (A2 descriptor):** Can find specific, predictable information in simple everyday material such as advertisements, prospectuses, menus, reference lists and timetables.
- Oral comprehension
 - **Understanding as a member of a live audience (high-B1 descriptor):** Can recognise the point of view expressed and distinguish this from facts being reported.

Final goal

Activity 4

Activity 3

Activity 1

Activity 2



What activities and/or language will help our learners carry out the final task?

Preparing learners for job interviews (B1/B2)

- Language points:
- Any particular tenses or grammatical structures?
- Any particular vocabulary?
- Any useful chunks/phrases?

- Anything else (not necessarily language related)?



Useful preparation for job interviews?

- Grammatical structures
- **Past simple, present continuous and present perfect continuous tenses** to talk about past, present or recent activity (e.g., “ I wrote reports” / “I’m working right now” / “I’ve been improving my English”)
- **Question formation** (e.g., “Will any training be provided?”)
- Lexicogrammar
- Ways of talking about **future plans/ambitions** (e.g., “I’m hoping to move to an English-speaking country” / “I’m thinking of applying for an M.A.”)
- Ways of talking about **job roles and responsibilities** (e.g., “I was responsible for training new staff” / “I was in charge of hiring”)

Preparation for job interviews (cont.)

- Vocabulary
 - **Verbs to talk about previous job roles/responsibilities** (e.g., “I had to liaise with other departments” / “I inputted data into the system”)
 - **Vocabulary to describe personality** (e.g., “I’m definitely a team player”)
 - **Vocabulary to describe previous experiences** (e.g., “I found it very rewarding” / “It was quite challenging”)
- Other
 - Tips for how to approach an interview, interview do’s and don’ts, etc.
 - Right language ‘choices’ (e.g., slightly more formal, less colloquial)
 - Non-linguistic aspects (e.g., body language)

Backwards planning in your teaching context

- Choose a group of learners you teach regularly
- Think of a final lesson task for them - something you want them to be able to do, or do better (try to make it a 'real-life' aim, rather than a 'grammar aim')
- Think about some activities/language that you could give to your learners to help them carry out this final task better

CEFR in English



CEFR in French



Full range of descriptors can be
found in chapter 3 (page 47 in
English version, page 48 in
French version)

Reflection

- How do you feel about the idea of backwards planning?
- Is there anything from this session that you would like to think about/use in your own teaching?

Drawbacks of Backwards planning

- Time-consuming
- Learners may still regard the final communicative task as mere practice of the language taught

Concluding thoughts

- PPP has its uses, but also certain drawbacks
- Backwards planning is not a perfect solution, but...
- It prioritises our learners' real life needs and goals
- It allows us to justify our choice of activities and language for the lesson(s)
- It makes us sharper teachers

“(The CEFR) also clearly suggests planning backwards from learners’ real-life communicative needs, with consequent alignment between curriculum, teaching and assessment.”
(Common European Framework of Reference, 2018, p.31)

Might your learners want to do any of these things in English?

- Plan a night out/holiday/outing with friends
- Write an online review of a hotel, restaurant, company, etc.
- Have a conversation about the weather
- Make small talk before a conference
- Talk about problems at work/university
- Give recommendations about good places to go
- Convince someone to do/not to do something
- Tell a travel anecdote
- Have a conversation about a current affair or news story

References

- Willis, D. (1990). *The Lexical Syllabus*. Collins Cobuild.

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