EFL Information Gap Activities for Architecture Majors

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A large body of literature supports the notion that information gap activities, if constructed well, can play a significant role in lesson planning for subjects which require the memorization and use of a substantial number of complex vocabulary words, such as architecture. This paper describes information gap activities and how they may be assessed, and provides several original activities which may be used with architecture majors. It is hoped that a reader of this paper will be able to successfully use these activities with architecture majors, or easily construct new activities for other majors based their structure.

Keywords: architecture instruction, EFL materials, information gaps, foreign language instruction

Information gap activities may occupy an important role in the lesson plans of many EFL teachers, as they may be one of the clearest ways to check how well one student can transmit and understand information with another (O’Malley & Valdez Pierce, 1996). In an information gap activity or assessment, the designer deliberately creates a situation in which one student is given information, while another is not. “Bridging that gap” successfully is the goal of this type of activity, to help improve and measure oral proficiency (Underhill, 1987).

However, as Yearwood (2008) has noted, information learned in one context is not necessarily transferred to another context. In addition, presenting the same information repeatedly, spaced over time, greatly enhances effective processing (deWinstanley & Bjork, 2002; Dempster, 1987). Therefore, in this paper the same information is presented in three different contexts, and similar vocabulary and structures are used across the activities to provide reinforcement.

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The “face validity” of an activity in which students listen and transfer information to a drawing or design will increase as the topic is more directly relevant to the students (Morley, 1991). The following is a set of three different types of information gap activities which could be used with architecture majors of false beginner/low intermediate English ability, involving tasks directly relevant to their possible future profession. These activities focus on an introduction to vocabulary associated with residential housing (Curl, 2000). As a set, these activities are meant to promote vocabulary development through elaboration, which in turn will enhance effective processing, in that the variety of tasks compels the student to increase the variety of associations formed with the information (Marzano, 2004).

The first of the following activities involves the construction of house plans, in which a student must imagine and sketch a diagram based on a partial set of notes read aloud by another student. In the second activity, students listen to a set of sentences and see how they correspond to photographs of things they may encounter as architects. The third activity takes the information from the first and second parts and presents it in a dialogue.

Activity 1. Describing and Drawing a Building

INSTRUCTIONS:

Student A draws a house or building, then describes it to Student B. Student B listens carefully and attempts to make a diagram of the structure. Student B is free to add new information (for example, if a kitchen is not mentioned by Student A, then it can be any shape or size, or there can be no kitchen at all), but all the information from Student A’s description should be included in the diagram. After 3-5 repetitions, the students compare their drawings.

Figure 1. An example of a diagram Student A might describe to Student B.
Sample Description A:

- There is a cabin in a small town.
  It is about 960 square feet.
  It sits on 1 acre of land.
- There is a forest behind the house.
- To the left of the house is a lovely garden.
- It has one window in the front, and two windows in the back.
- It has one window on the left side, and two windows on the right side.
- It has one bedroom in the back of the house.
- There is also a large dining room in the back of the house.
- The dining room has an exit with a few stairs outside the door. They lead to the porch.
- The entrance is in the front of the house, on the right.
- A small bathroom is in the front of the house, on the left.
- The entrance leads directly into a rather large living room.

![Diagram](image)

*Figure 2. An example of a diagram Student A might describe to Student B.*

Sample Description B:

- There is a large blue house in a suburb of a big city. We will discuss the first floor.
  The house is approximately 3,760 square feet.
  It sits on 2 acres of land.
- There is a lawn in front of the house, and a street on the left side of the house.
- There is a large garage in the front of the house on the left side.
- The family room is behind the garage.
- There is a kitchen to the right of the family room.
- The kitchen and the family room are roughly the same size.
There is a dining room in the front of the house, on the right.
The dining room is about half the size of the family room.
There’s a storage room to the left of the dining room.
The storage room is next to a small bathroom.
There’s a small closet to the right of the kitchen.

Activity 2. Placing pictures in chronological order

INSTRUCTIONS:
In this activity, Student A looks at a six-point outline which provides the basis for a story. She may expand upon the story as she wishes, but the six points must be presented in chronological order. Student B looks at a set of six photographs (which may be created by the teacher, or taken from magazines or newspapers) and puts them in order. After 3-5 readings, the students compare their work.

Sample Outline A - Renovations
1. The owner of a cabin evaluates scuffs on a wall in preparation for a new paint job.
2. She plans to rebuild the stairs.
3. The drain in the bathroom sink will be replaced.
4. The cloth curtains are slightly frayed, and will be replaced with cotton.
5. The hardwood floor will be covered with a large rug.
6. The pipes need to be checked by a qualified plumber.
Sample Outline B - A prospective buyer inspects the property of a home

1. A prospective buyer steps outside a house, inspecting the doorknob and lock as he exits.
2. He looks at the driveway and wonders if it needs to be repaved.
3. A wall on the left side of the house looks like it’s in good condition.
4. The front lawn is in good shape.
5. The prospective buyer thinks the power lines may be too close to the house.
6. He inspects a fence in the backyard.

Activity 3. Completing a dialogue

INSTRUCTIONS:

In this activity, two students listen to a recording of a dialogue about the house they have discussed in Activity 1 and 2. Student A has a copy of the entire dialogue, while Student B has a paper which provides only Student A’s part. Student B must listen to the dialogue carefully and attempt to fill in her part. After the recording is played three times, Students A and B read the dialogue together (they should be encouraged to vary intonation to show emotion while reading). Student B need not repeat a perfect dictation, but it must contain all the key words and structures (underlined on Student A’s paper). When Student B makes mistakes or is missing information, Student A should provide a hint. If Student B still cannot complete the line after one or two hints, Student A should read the line verbatim until Student B can complete it, rather than simply showing her the paper and having her copy it. Once the dialogue is completed, Student B should turn her paper over, and Student A should ask four comprehension questions. These questions should be printed solely on Student A’s paper, and the answers are contained within the dialogues.
Dialogue 1

Customer: It’s a pleasure to meet you.
Architect: Same here, it’s really nice to meet you.
Customer: So, I’m interested in building a condo.
Architect: You know, we have plans to construct a new home in two months.
Customer: I’m intrigued. I’m interested in hearing about it.
Architect: It’s a cabin.
Customer: That’s fantastic, my wife and I have always wanted to live in a cabin.
Architect: It will be in front of a forest, so you’ll be able to have some privacy.
Customer: What’s the property like?
Architect: There’s a lawn and a garden. It’s a relaxing place.
Customer: Can you tell me more about the interior?
Architect: Sure. It will have a large family room.
Customer: Will there be a dining room?
Architect: Yes, a dining room overlooking a porch.
Customer: Will there be a place for my car?
Architect: We plan to build a carport.
Customer: How about the floors?
Architect: All hardwood. I really think you’ll like this place.

Comprehension Questions
1. Is the customer’s wife interested in a cabin?
2. Can you describe the property around the cabin?
3. Does the dining room overlook a pool?
4. Is there presently a carport?

Dialogue 2

Customer: Hi, I’m really glad we’re finally getting the chance to talk.
Architect: Me too, it’s great to be able to work with you.
Customer: So, I’m interested in buying a large home for my family.
Architect: OK, how many people are in your family?
Customer: Four, it’s me, my wife, and two kids.
Architect: So, you might be interested in a home with a large family room?
Customer: Yes, that would be great.
Architect: We have a house available in the Green Pines development which might be suitable for you.

Customer: Can you tell me about it?

Architect: You’d have an acre of property, and you could move in as soon as April.

Customer: What sort of area is it?

Architect: It’s a very residential area. It’s more than two miles from land where commercial buildings are permitted.

Customer: Does your firm have much experience in this county?

Architect: Yes. Our firm was established in 1979.

Customer: I’d like to look at a map of the area, if I may.

Architect: Of course, let’s take a look and talk about it.

Comprehension Questions

1. Where is the house located?
2. How many acres of land surround the home?
3. Is the house in a residential area or a commercial area?
4. When was the firm established?

In assessing student progress and achievement for an information gap activity, the ability of the listener (Student B) to complete a task or correctly follow directions must be assessed. If the activity requires a reconstruction (such as in Activity 1 above), the accuracy and quality of the reconstruction must be evaluated (O’Malley & Valdez Pierce, 1996). The following holistic ratings system provides one way to evaluate an information gap activity:
Table 1. Holistic Scoring Rubric for Oral EFL Information Gap Activities

**Excellent (4)**
A variety of descriptive expressions and vocabulary are used
Communication is effective, the interaction is developed well
A variety of structures are used
Grammatical errors are infrequent
Minimal pauses in speech

**Good (3)**
A variety of descriptive vocabulary and expressions are used
Communication is effective, the interaction is often developed well
A variety of structures are used
Grammatical errors occur more frequently
There is significant hesitation in speech, but it doesn't interfere with communication

**Fair (2)**
Occasional descriptive vocabulary and expressions are used
Some responses are inadequate or inappropriate
Grammatical errors occur which sometimes interfere with communication
Significant hesitation which interferes with effective communication

**Poor (1)**
Only low level expressions and vocabulary are used
Most responses are inadequate or inappropriate
Grammatical errors occur frequently which interfere with communication
Very frequent hesitation which hinders communication

(Adapted from O’Malley & Valdez Pierce, 1996)

There is a lack of materials available for EFL courses involving certain subjects, as Gulyamova (2000) has noted. Furthermore, excellent ESP textbooks may be available for a subject area, but they may utilize a higher level of English ability than is appropriate for a given class. Teachers instructing a class for which there is no appropriate textbook available must write their own activities and create numerous materials. In this paper, I have attempted to provide teachers with an easily modifiable template which could be used to create original
information gap activities for EFL students of various levels. Teachers who are interested in reviewing numerous similar supplementary activities are invited to visit http://eflamgap.blogspot.com/.

References


建築学科のための EFL の構成について

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“Information gap 指導法”が適切に構成されたものであるならば、建築学のような相当数の複雑な語彙を必要とする学科の教授において、意義深い役割を果たすとの考えは多くの研究において支持されている。本論は“Information gap 指導法”がどのようなものであるかを述べるとともに、建築学科における英語教授に有効と思われるいくつかの独創的な指導法を提示するものである。著者はこの指導法が建築学科において活用され、また他の専攻における新しい指導法に役立つことを望むものである。

キーワード：建築学教授、EFL 資料、information gaps、外国言語教授

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