

Bringing Grammar to Life with Experiential Learning

Students often study grammar for years, yet still have difficulty applying it in real-world contexts. An experiential approach to grammar can address this issue by enabling students to use language in many different real-life situations.

In this session, we will:

- explore how experiential learning provides authentic, real-world communicative contexts for using specific grammar points.
- examine practical, creative activities for bringing grammar to life that can be tailored for different class sizes and learners of different ages or proficiency levels.



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Amanda Hilliard



With over a decade of experience, Amanda Hilliard has taught English in the Republic of Korea, Vietnam, Ecuador, Tanzania, and Hungary, and in the United States in Georgia, Texas, and Arizona. Currently, she works as an ESL Instructor at Arizona State University and a TEFL Certificate Instructor at International TEFL Academy. Previously, she served as a U.S. Department of State English Language Fellow in Hue, Vietnam.

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Bringing Grammar to Life with Experiential Learning



“I hear and I forget,
I see and I remember,
I do and I understand.”
- Confucius



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Scenario:

**Imagine you want to learn how to play basketball.
Which method below would you choose?**

- A. Read a book about the rules of basketball.**
- B. Watch a video of a basketball game.**
- C. Talk to someone about their favorite basketball team.**
- D. Get a ball and practice on the court with your friend.**



Goals of Session:

To understand experiential learning and how it can be applied to English language teaching

To acknowledge some advantages and challenges of experiential learning

To build understanding of the experiential learning cycle

To learn and apply a 4-step process to creating experiential learning lessons



What is experiential learning?

Experiential Learning is learning by doing.

“For the things we have to **learn** before we can do them, we **learn** by doing them.”

Aristotle, 350 BC

“...connection between **education** and **personal experience**.”

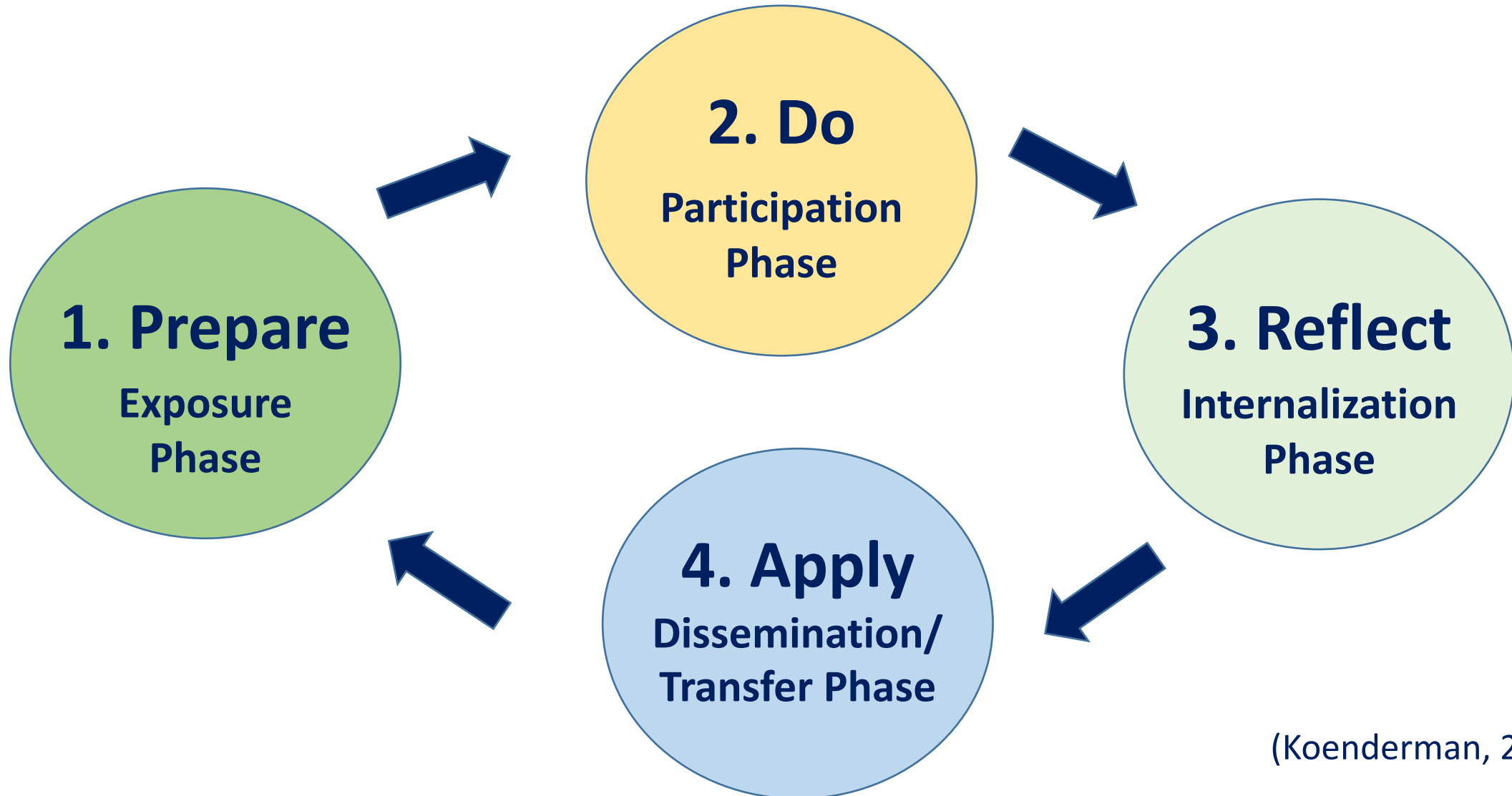
Dewey, 1938



MOHAWK

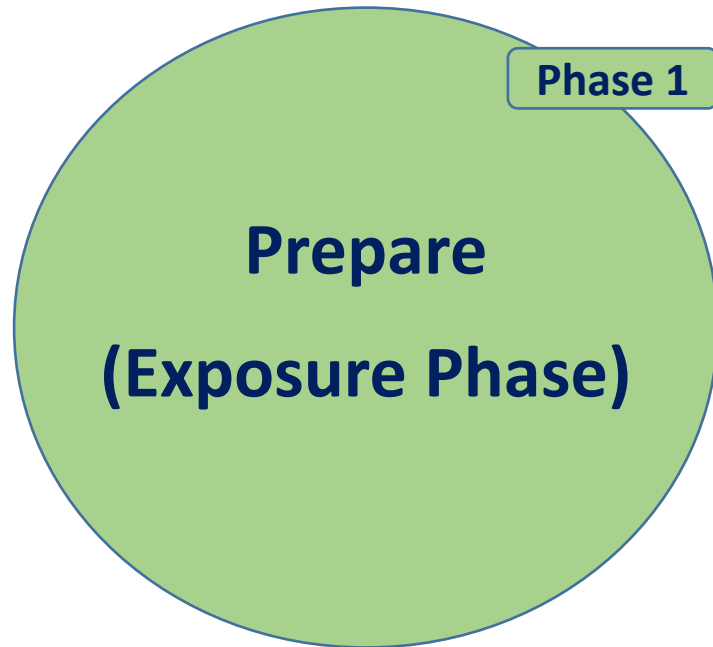
Kolb, 1984

The Experiential Learning Cycle in ESL/EFL: Four Phases



(Koenderman, 2000)

Experiential Learning Cycle in ESL/EFL



Phase 1

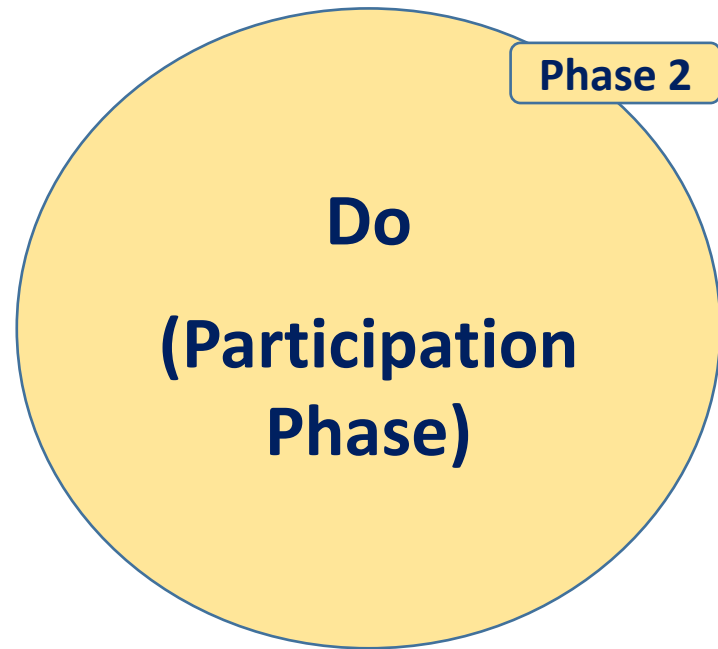
Activate background schema, past experiences, and/or prior knowledge

Understand activity objectives

Set individual goals

Teach important vocabulary/grammar

Experiential Learning Cycle in ESL/EFL



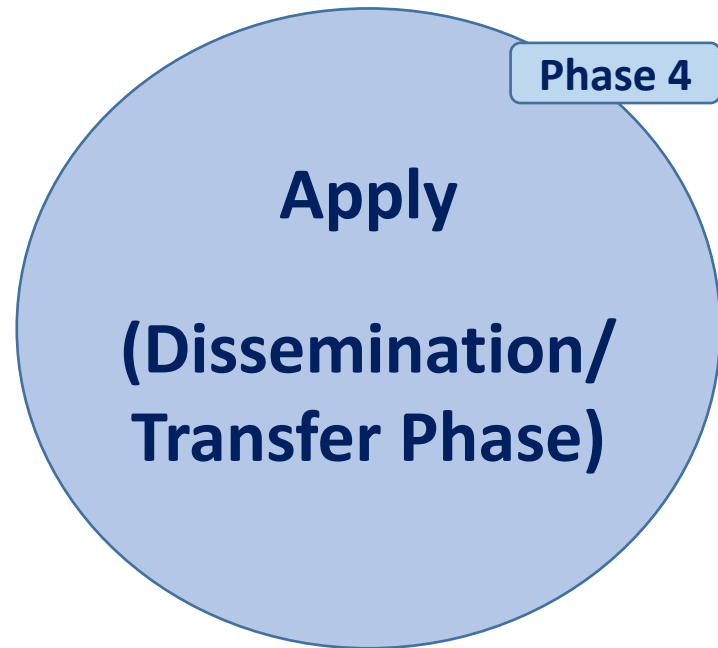
Engage in the experience/activity

Experiential Learning Cycle in ESL/EFL



Reflect on experience, feelings, and language learning

Experiential Learning Cycle in ESL/EFL



Link classroom learning with the “real world”

Pause and Reflect

Think about your own classes.

How often do you incorporate these four phases into activities?



(Koenderman, 2000)

Experiential Learning Example: Restaurant Role-Play



Experiential Learning Cycle



Activate background schema, past experiences, and/or prior knowledge related to ordering food at restaurant

Teach important vocabulary/grammar

Read restaurant dialogue

Prepare: Background Knowledge

Warm-up:

1. Do you eat out often?
2. What's your favorite restaurant?
3. When was the last time you ate at a restaurant?
4. What did you order?



Waiter: Can I take your order?

Customer: Yes, I would like the hamburger and french fries.

Waiter: Good choice. Would you like anything to drink with that?

Customer: Yes, I would like a diet Coke.

Waiter: Okay, would you like to order anything else?

Customer: No, that's all.

Waiter: How's the food? Can I bring you anything else?

Customer: Yes, could I get some ketchup please?

Waiter: Of course. Here you are.

Waiter: Would you like any dessert?

Customer: No, thanks. Could you just bring me the bill?

Waiter: Sure, here you are. That'll be twelve dollars.

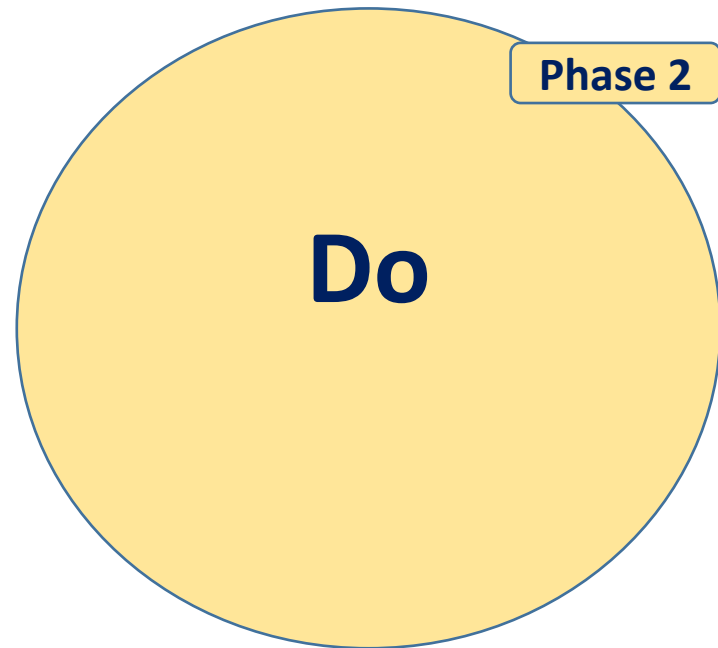
Customer: Here you are. Thank you very much.

Waiter: My pleasure. Have a nice day.

Directions:

1. Read the dialogue aloud with a partner two times.
2. Circle the modals.
3. Read the dialogue again, replacing the underlined words.

Experiential Learning Cycle



Students practice the restaurant role-play





Starters:

Chips and Salsa

Soup

Salad

Desserts:

Ice cream

Chocolate Cake

Cheesecake

Entrees:

Pasta

Hamburger

Cheese Pizza

Drinks:

Soda

Juice

Coffee



Do: Role-play Example

Customer:

I would like . . .

Could I have . . .

Waiter:

Can I take your order?

Would you like . . .

Experiential Learning Cycle

Phase 3

Reflect

Students discuss how the role-play went, and their feelings during the role-play.



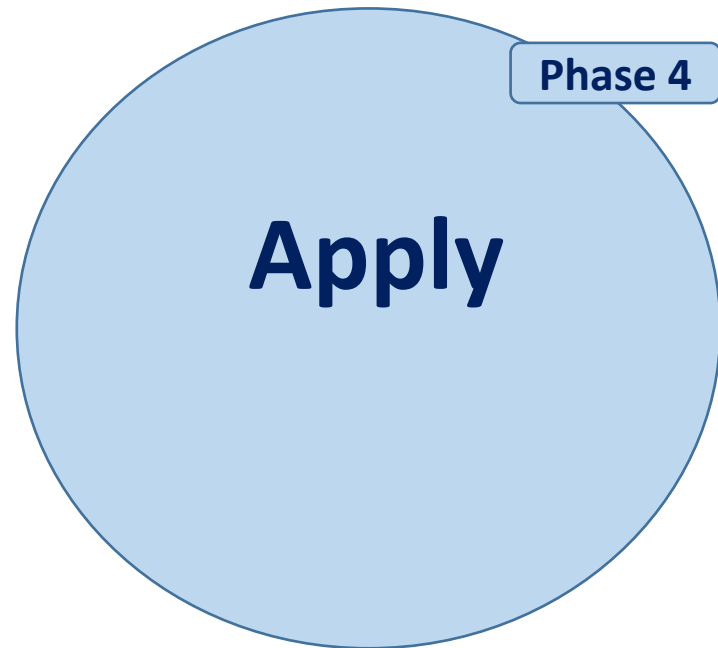
Reflect: Example

Think-Pair-Share

- 1) What did you like about the activity?
- 2) How was it similar to the last time you ordered food in a restaurant?
How was it different?
- 3) What was difficult about ordering?
- 4) How did you feel during the role-play?



Experiential Learning Cycle



Students plan how to order food in “real life.”

Students think about how they might do things differently.



Apply: Example

Find the menu for your favorite restaurant online.

Imagine you're ordering food.

Write down five specific things you would say when ordering:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Pop Quiz!

Imagine your students are doing a role-play for shopping at a market.

In which phase would students think about what went well or didn't go well?

1. Prepare
2. Do
3. Reflect
4. Apply



Pop Quiz!

Imagine your students are doing a role-play for shopping at a market.

In which phase would they participate in the role-play?

1. Prepare
2. Do
3. Reflect
4. Apply



Pop Quiz!

Imagine your students are doing a role-play for shopping at a market.

In which phase would they learn new vocabulary and grammar?

1. Prepare
2. Do
3. Reflect
4. Apply



Pop Quiz!

Imagine your students are doing a role-play shopping at a market.

In which phase would they consider how to use the new language in their next visit to the market?

1. Prepare
2. Do
3. Reflect
4. Apply



How about you?



What are some
benefits of using
experiential learning?

Benefits of Experiential Learning:

- Motivates students
 - Creates positive self-image and confidence
 - Leads to deeper learning and self awareness through reflection
 - Improves other skills (in addition to language skills)
 - Helps students transfer language skills to the “real world”
 - Is compatible with many other approaches
- (Knutson, 2003)



How about you?



What are some
challenges of using
experiential learning?

Challenges of Experiential Learning:

- Takes more time
 - Requires training for teachers
 - Requires different types of assessment
 - Involves group/pair work
- (Knutson, 2003)



Teaching Tips!

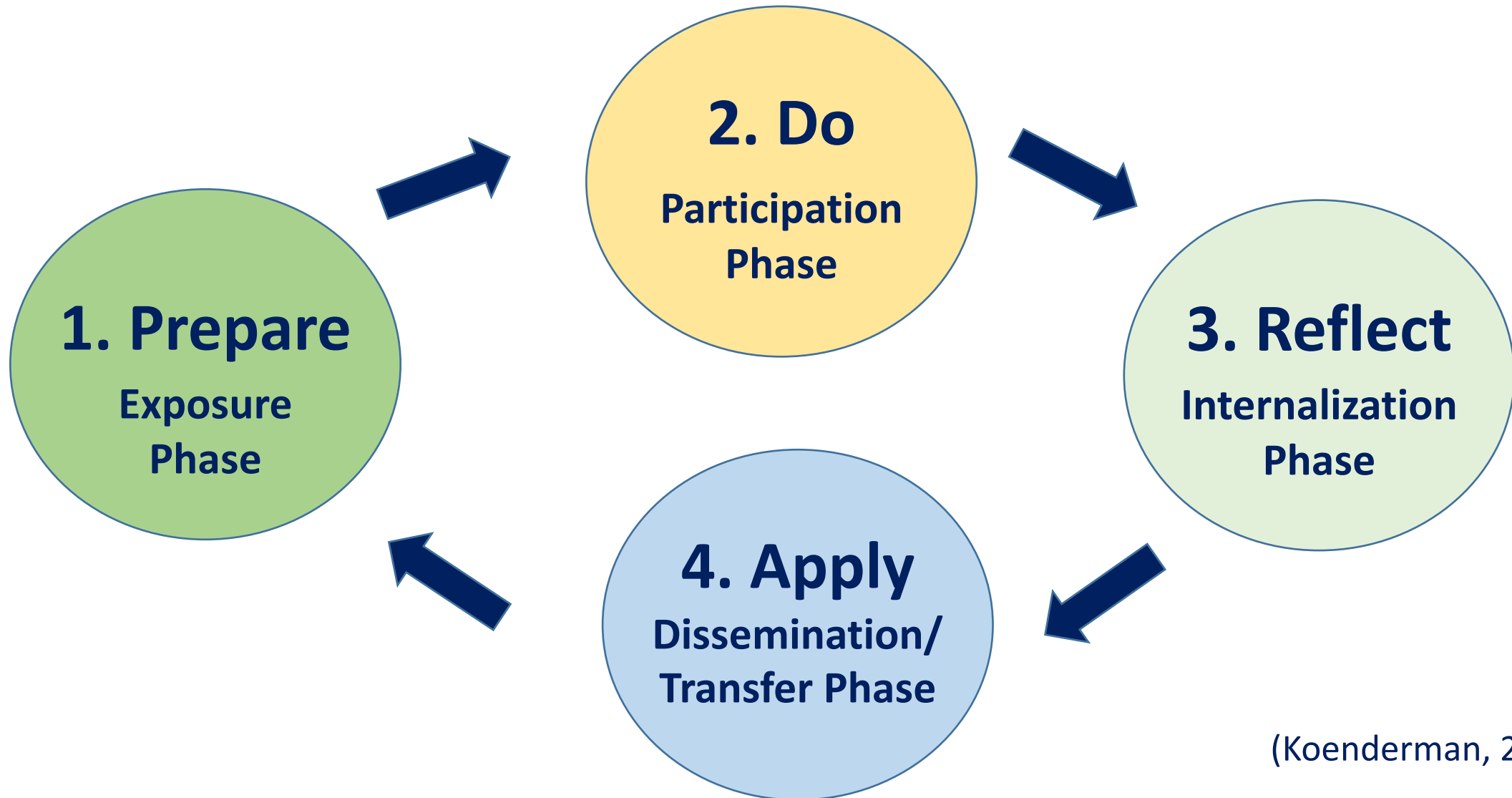
1. Make your **objectives** clear.
2. Create a **comfortable** environment for students.
3. Use **relevant, real, and engaging** activities.
4. Choose **appropriate activities** for your students.
5. When possible, give learners **choice** and **autonomy**.
6. Involve the **whole person**, including senses, feelings, and personalities.
7. Include opportunities for **reflection**.





Now let's try
creating a
lesson plan
together!

The Experiential Learning Cycle in ESL/EFL: Four Phases



(Koenderman, 2000)

Let's try it together!

Step 1:

Think about the grammar point.

- How is it used in real life?
- In which situations would people use this grammar point?

Grammar: Imperatives/Commands

Real-Life Uses:

- **Giving directions/instructions** ★
- Giving orders
- Advising/requesting someone to do (or not do) something

Activity: Writing and following a recipe ★



2. Do

Writing and Following a Recipe

I've brought in ingredients for making a salad. With a partner, choose your ingredients and write the steps for your salad below:

Ingredients:

-
-
-

Directions:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.



Now, let's make it together in pairs!

Pause and Reflect

**What makes this
activity an
experiential
learning activity?**



Experiential Learning



Experiential Learning =
learning by doing!



Students are using English
to write their recipes and
make the food.

Let's try it together!

Step 2:

Think about what students will need to know to complete the activity.

Prepare pre-activity materials/practice.



1. Prepare

Writing and Following a Recipe:

- Read a recipe/watch a short cooking video
- **Review key vocabulary/phrases** ★
- **Act out a recipe or practice filling in verbs in a recipe first** ★

Prepare: Background Knowledge

Warm-up:

Check the boxes for your opinion below. Then, discuss with a partner.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I like cooking.					
I always follow a recipe when cooking.					
I like trying new ingredients and recipes.					
I'm a good cook.					

Prepare: Vocabulary Review

Cooking Vocabulary:

Cut

Slice

Rinse

Mix

Pour

Stir

Bake

Fry



Prepare: Verb Review

Look at the recipe below. Fill in the missing verbs: cut, slice, rinse, mix, pour, stir

Fruit Salad:

Ingredients:

- 3 cups of Strawberries
- 2 cups of raspberries
- 6 kiwis
- 1 pineapple
- ¼ cup of honey
- 2 tsp lime zest
- 1 ½ tbsp lime juice



Directions:

1. _____ the strawberries in half.
2. _____ the raspberries.
3. _____ the kiwis into small pieces.
4. _____ the pineapple into large chunks.
5. In a separate bowl, _____ the honey, lime zest, and lime juice together.
6. _____ the dressing over the fruit and _____ together.

Let's try it together!

Step 3

Add a review or reflection task to help students solidify the grammar point.



3. Reflect

Examples:

- Review student mistakes/grammar from the activity.
- Have students reflect on what went well (or didn't go well), what was easy/difficult about the activity, etc.
- Connect it to students' past experiences.
- **Have students think about new language they learned.**★

You're the student!

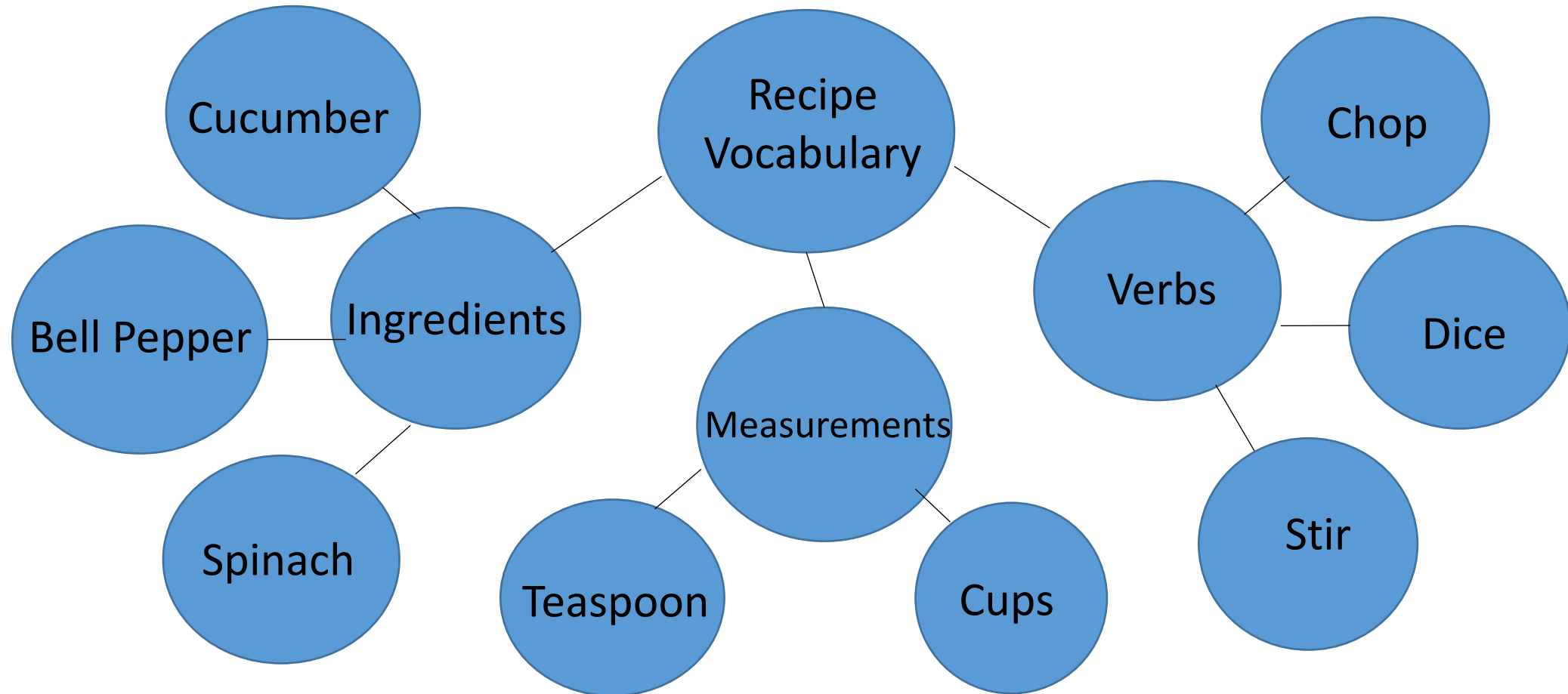


Imagine you're a student and you've just completed the recipe writing activity. How would you answer the question below:

What new language did you learn while writing your recipes?

Reflect: New Language Word Wall

You could take student reflections and create a word wall like this!



Let's try it together!

Step 4

Link classroom learning to the “real world.”



4. Apply

Examples:

- Have students reflect on how they could use this in real life
- **Have students reflect on how they could apply it to a different situation**★
- Ask students to plan what they will do in a real-life situation

Apply: Example Activity

Think about your favorite recipe.

What ingredients do you need and what cooking verbs would you use?

Write down three ingredients and three steps for the recipe. Then, share with a new partner:

Ingredients:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Steps:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Lesson Plan: Writing a Recipe

Objective: Students will be able to use imperative verbs to write and follow a recipe.

Materials: Worksheets, vegetables/utensils for making salads

1. Prepare	2. Do	3. Reflect	4. Apply
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Warm-up• Introduce vocabulary• Fill-in-the-blanks recipe worksheet	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Write and follow recipes• Share	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review vocabulary and grammar from lesson• Create a word wall	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Write <u>three</u> ingredients and steps for a different recipe• Share with partner/whole class

Share

How could you
assess students
during this activity?



Assessment: Rubric

Categories	Excellent	Good	Needs Improvement
Ingredients	Ingredients are clearly listed with measurements.	Ingredients are listed without measurements.	No ingredients or measurements listed.
Steps	All necessary steps are included in recipe.	Recipe may be missing 1 or 2 steps.	No steps listed in recipe.
Vocabulary	Recipe uses at least 3 cooking verbs and 3 new ingredient vocabulary words.	Recipe uses 1-2 cooking verbs and 1-2 new ingredient vocabulary words.	Recipe does not use new vocabulary.
Grammar	Each recipe step uses imperative verbs in the correct form to give commands.	Recipe uses some imperatives to give commands, but has a few mistakes.	Recipe doesn't use imperatives to give commands.
Group Work	Students work well together and stay on task.	Students work together and mostly stay on task.	Students don't work well together or stay on task.

Could also use self-evaluation, participation points, or formative assessments for activities.

Share

How might you adapt this activity if you couldn't involve food in-class?



Modifications/Adaptations

Have students act out the recipes without using real food



Have students create a cooking video outside of class to post on a class website (great for digital classes!)





Let's try creating
another lesson
plan together!

Let's try it together!

Step 1:

Think about the grammar point.

- How is it used in real life?
- In which situations would people use this grammar point?

Grammar: Be going to

Real-Life Uses:

- **Future Plans** ★
- Predictions
- Express that something is about to happen

Activity: Making a group travel itinerary ★



2. Do

Example: Group Travel Itinerary

You are going to take a three-day trip with your classmates.
Fill out the table below with information for your trip.
Be ready to share your answers with the class.

Where are you going to go?	
What are you going to pack?	1. 2. 3.
What are you going to do there?	1. 2. 3.
How are you going to get there?	
Where are you going to stay?	

Pause and Reflect

What makes this activity an experiential learning activity?



Experiential Learning



Experiential Learning =
learning by doing!



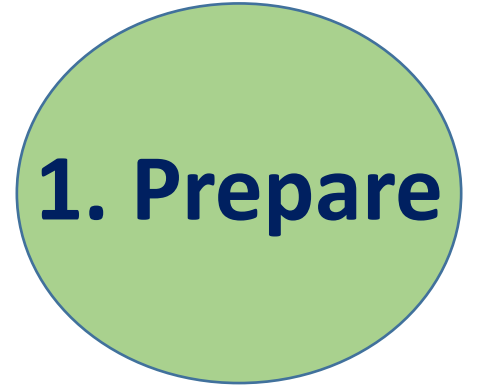
Students are using
English to create a real
travel itinerary in groups.

Let's try it together!

Step 2

Think about what students will need to know to complete the activity.

Prepare pre-activity materials/practice.



Group Travel Itinerary:

- Read Travel Brochures/Travel Itineraries
- Review Travel Vocabulary/grammar
- Read about a trip someone is planning to take★

Prepare: Background Knowledge

Warm-up: Discuss the questions with a partner.

1. Describe your last vacation. Where did you go and what did you do?
2. Look at the picture. Would you like to take a vacation there? Why or why not?
3. What do you need to think about when planning a trip? Write down at least five things.



Prepare: Reading Activity

Reading Text:

Hi John –

I'm so excited about my family trip to London next week. We're going to fly, arriving early on Friday morning. We're going to stay in the Marriot Hotel near Big Ben.

On the **first** day, we're going to visit Parliament House and Buckingham Palace. I can't wait to see the changing of the guards! On the **second** day, we're going to ride the London Eye. We're also going to walk around Hyde Park. The **last** day, we're going to see St. Paul's Cathedral and Kensington Palace.

The weather is nice this time of year, so I'm going to pack some shorts and t-shirts, along with some comfortable tennis shoes since we're going to walk a lot! I'll tell you all about it in school when we get back from vacation.

Your friend,
Tim

Directions:

Read the text and answer the questions:

1. Where is Tim's family going to go?
2. How are they going to get there?
3. Where is his family going to stay?
4. What are they going to do there?
5. What is Tim going to pack? Why?

Let's try it together!

Step 3

Add a review or reflection task to help students solidify the grammar point.



Examples:

- **Review difficult grammar from the activity.** ★
- Have students reflect on what went well (or didn't go well), what was easy/difficult about the activity, etc.
- Connect it to students' past experiences.
- Have students think about new language they learned.

Reflect: Example Activity

“Be going to” Contractions:

I am going to = I’m going to

He/she is going to = he’s/she’s going to

You are going to = you’re going to

We are going to = we’re going to

They are going to = they’re going to

Spoken English:

Going to = gonna

Examples from presentations:

We are going to spend three days in Thailand.

= We’re going to (gonna) spend three days in Thailand.

We are going to go to the art museum downtown.

= We’re going to (gonna) go to the art museum downtown.

Let's try it together!

Step 4

Link classroom learning to the “real world.”



4. Apply

Examples:

- Have students reflect on how they could use this in real life
- **Have students reflect on how they could apply it to a different situation** ★
- Ask students to plan what they will do in a real-life situation

Apply: Example Activity

Work with a partner and write down three other situations in which you could use “be + going to.”

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Other uses of “be + going to”

- Weekend plans: “My family’s going to go to the zoo on Sunday.”
- Plans for after class: “We’re gonna study for the test at our favorite café.”
- Talking about the weather: “It’s probably going to rain tomorrow.”

Lesson Plan: Group Travel Itinerary

Objectives: Students will be able to use “be going to” to make and present a travel itinerary in groups.

Materials: Reading worksheet, internet for research



1. Prepare	2. Do	3. Reflect	4. Apply
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Warm-up• Reading worksheet	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create and present travel itineraries	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review vocabulary and grammar from lesson	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• List other situations to use “be going to”

Share

How might you adapt this activity to make it more challenging for advanced learners?



Modifications/Adaptations

Have students create and present a more complicated itinerary with more details and vocabulary



Have students create an online brochure/advertisement for their trip (great for digital classes!)



Let's Review!

Experiential Learning = learning by doing!

Step 1: Choose a **real-life situation/use** for the grammar point and create an activity that will give students the **experience** of using the grammar point in real-life.

Step 2: Prepare **pre-activity materials/practice**.

Step 3: Add a **review or reflection task** to help students solidify the grammar point.

Step 4: Link classroom learning to “**real world**.”

Adapt/modify activities to fit your class.

Pause and Reflect

**Which activity will
you try using with the
experiential learning
cycle?**



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Reflection Questions

1. What types of grammar activities do you, or could you, use to help your students connect the target language with real-life situations?
2. What aspects of learning are important to consider when preparing students to use grammar in authentic contexts?
3. Do you often allow students time to reflect on their learning performance after an activity? How might this practice help students develop as learners?



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