

# Two Halves or a Whole?

Reflecting on Two Approaches to  
English Discussion in an Online  
Format


Jamie G. Sturges & Shoko Kita  
Rikkyo University  
Teacher Journeys 2020

# Overview

- Background information
- Discussion lesson formats
  - 40 minutes with 5 students (2 sessions): Jamie
  - 80 minutes with 10 students (1 session): Shoko
- Reflection and connection
- Question by email



# Background

- Currently teach and develop English Discussion Course curriculum at Rikkyo University in the Foreign Language Education and Research Center (FLER)/外国語教育研究センター
  - 1st year students, 10 students in a class
  - Levels of students in our class (based on TOEIC)
    - Level I: 780+
    - **Level II: 480-779**
    - **Level III: 280-479**
    - Level IV: below 279
  - Same in-house textbook
- 

# English Discussion, Spring 2020 (Face-to-face format)

## Regular Lesson Overview and Methodology

**Regular Lessons:** Lessons 2-13.

Below is the general suggested timing for each stage of the regular lesson.

Regular Lesson Plan	
Time	Stage
5 min.	Checking Homework Completion
10-15 min.	Fluency
5-10 min.	Discussion Skill Presentation / Communication Skill Review
10-15 min.	Discussion Skill Practice
25-30 min.	Discussion 1 (D1)
30-35 min.	Discussion 2 (D2)

# English Discussion, Spring 2020

- Face-to-face format
- Due to Covid-19, forced to move online
- Preference for Zoom
- University contract with Zoom



# Two suggested online options

## 2 x 40-minute lessons

- Two groups of five students
  - 40 minutes: group 1
  - 10-minute break or overflow buffer
  - 40 minutes: group 2
  - 10-minute overflow buffer
- Allocate remaining 60 minutes of class to offline work

## 80-minute lessons

- All 10 students together
- Allocate remaining 20 minutes of class time to offline work

## 2 x 40-minute format (Jamie)

- Why did I choose this format?
- Planning notes
- Lesson format
  - Structure in lesson
  - Assignments & expectations outside of lesson



## 2 x 40-minute format (Jamie): Why this format?

- Concern about student capabilities in an online format
- Challenge to condense Discussion lesson into an efficient and active session
- Create a solid and reliable routine for students week-to-week
- Minimize student anxiety in the online classroom environment





## 2 x 40-minute format (Jamie): Planning notes

- 10 students randomly sorted into two 5-student groups per week
  - Exception: Discussion test lessons
- Students were sent Zoom invite to their class (with time) a few days before the lesson
- No issues with students entering the wrong class



## 2 x 40-minute format (Jamie): Format in class

0:00	Greetings, agenda, HW reminders for next lesson
3:00	Target language intro and student-volunteered reading of textbook sample dialogue
6:00	Further explanation and controlled practice of target skill
15:00	Pair/trio Breakout room practice with less control followed by brief feedback
21:00	Brief preparation for all-group discussion, reminder of TL goals, and final Q&A
23:00	All-group discussion using Discussion 2 in textbook
37:00	Feedback on Discussion and HW reminders for next lesson



# 2 x 40-minute format (Jamie): Format in class

## Connecting Ideas

### Asking Others to Connect

What do you think of {my / name's} idea? (I agree.) As {you / name} said,...

Do you agree with {me / name}?

### Connecting to Others' Ideas

(I'm sorry, but I disagree.) {You / name} said..., but...

#### **Topic: Where to Live**

Ryo: Which is a better place to study abroad – in a big city or in a small town?  
What does everyone think?

Eri: In my opinion, a small town is a better place to study abroad.

Ryo: Why do you think so?

Eri: It's mainly because there are fewer people for you to speak Japanese with. You have to use the foreign language more, and that will make the experience better. **What do you think of my idea?**

Aki: I agree. **As you said**, living in a small town is better for improving language skills. Another reason is you can make deeper friendships with the local people. **Do you agree with me?**

Jun: I'm sorry, but I disagree. **You said** studying abroad in a small town is better for language skills and making friends, **but** I think a small town is too boring. There are more activities and opportunities to meet many types of people in big cities.

Aki: Can you give me an example?

Jun: For example, local festivals on holidays. Do you follow me?

Example of target skill and sample dialogue from textbook (Unit 6)

# 2 x 40-minute format (Jamie): Format in class



## Practice 2

*Discuss the following topics. Use today's phrases to connect ideas.*

- *Where to Live* Which is a better place to study abroad – in a big city or in a small town?
- *Who to Live with* Who is better for students to live with – other students or a host family?
- *How Long to Stay* How long should students study abroad?
- *Living in a Foreign Country* Should everyone work or live in a foreign country after graduating from university?

Example of target skill practice prompts for pair/trio Breakout room work from textbook (Unit 6)



# 2 x 40-minute format (Jamie): Format in class

## Discussion 2: Living and Working Abroad

### Preparation

❖ *Below are four opinions about living and working abroad. For each opinion, decide if you agree or disagree.*

Eri: In my opinion, living and working abroad is good for **language skills**. It's mainly because I would use a foreign language every day to communicate with different people.

*(agree / disagree)*

Aki: I think **making new friends** in a foreign country would be difficult. It's because I don't have good communication skills.

*(agree / disagree)*

Ryo: I'm not sure, but I think I would have **homesickness**. For example, I would miss my family and the food from my hometown.

*(agree / disagree)*

Jun: In my opinion, working in another country is a good idea. You can get useful **work experience** with people from different cultures.

*(agree / disagree)*

❖ *Discuss your ideas with a partner.*



### Discussion

1. Is living and working abroad a good idea? Discuss:
  - Language skills
  - Making new friends
  - Homesickness
  - Work experience
2. Is it important for everyone to experience living abroad?

Example of all-group Discussion 2  
from textbook (Unit 6)

# 2 x 40-minute format (Jamie): Format outside of class

- Blackboard
  - Weekly reading comprehension quiz available for week (one attempt allowed, 10-minute time limit)
  - Weekly Follow-up Questions & Feedback (one attempt allowed, 60-minute time limit)
    - 4 questions: content (about unit), skill (must respond to prompt using TL), reflection (how was your discussion?), and goal (what would you like to try next week?)
- Other expectations shared with students
  - Prepare for next discussion before class
  - Look ahead at next target language skill



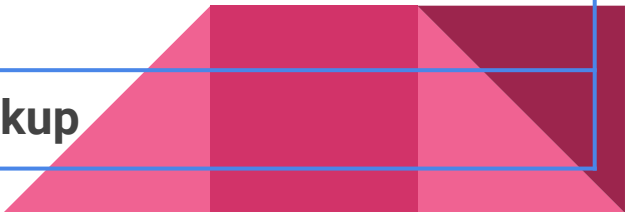
# 80-minute (regular lessons)

\*(40-min x 2 sessions in 3 test lessons)

Main reasons for my choice

- To replicate learning opportunities (esp. Speaking practice)
- To help students build rapport
- Test - assessing one group at a time

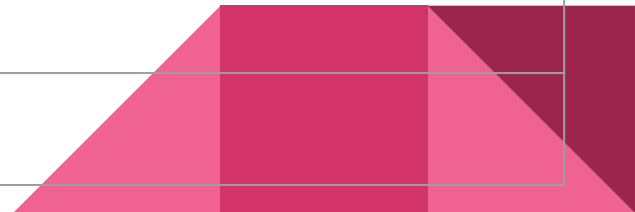


1. 10 mins (**offline**): Quiz on Blackboard before meeting online
  2. **5 mins**: Warm-up (sharing ideas about a topic in pairs)
  3. 10 min: Target discussion skill presentation
  4. **15-20 min**: Target skill practice in pairs
  5. 20 min: Assessed discussion in 2 groups **with 2 devices**  
(preparation, **12-15 min** discussion with scaffolding, feedback)
  6. 20 min: Assessed discussion in 2 groups with 2 devices  
(preparation, **12-15 min** discussion without scaffolding, feedback)
  7. 5 min: Final feedback & homework
  8. **10 min**: **Open room for questions / conversation / backup**
- 



	Face-to-Face	Online
Quiz about homework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4 min in class</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offline, Blackboard</li> <li>• Available for 24 hours, only once</li> </ul>
Warm-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 15 min fluency building</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 min talk about topics in pairs</li> </ul>
Target skill presentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Test-Teach-Test</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>
Target skill practice		
Assessed discussion 1		
Assessed discussion 2		
Feedback & Homework		
10 min open room		

	Face-to-Face	Online
Quiz about homework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 4 min in class</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Offline, Blackboard</li><li>• Available for 24 hours</li><li>• Only once</li></ul>



# Examples of self-study tasks: Discussion Skills

---

2. **Ask 2 questions about the opinions below, using “Asking for Different Viewpoints” and “Asking Others to Balance Opinions.”** E.g., “Can I ask a question? How about from a parent’s point of view?” “Can I ask a question? What are the advantages of having many children from the parents’ point of view?”

I’m not sure, but I think one disadvantage of allowing longer lunch break at work is that workers may need to stay longer in the office.

Q1: Can I ask a question? What are the advantages of allowing longer lunch break at work from the worker’s point of view?

Q2: Can I question? How about from a family’s point of view?

# Examples of self-study tasks: Idea generation

## 4. Brainstorming: Write advantages and disadvantages of each idea to reduce poverty.

	Advantages	Disadvantages
Providing free childcare for poor families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● One advantage is this may help increase the birth rate.</li><li>● Another advantage is creating an environment that is easy to raise children.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● One disadvantage is it costs a lot from the government's point of view.</li><li>● Another disadvantage is that it is not worth for poor people who don't have children.</li></ul>
Providing free health services for poor people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● The advantage is poor people can lead a healthy life.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● The disadvantage is that the government needs to secure new financial resources.</li></ul>

# Examples of self-study tasks: Reflection

5. Write two things you did well in the discussion test today. 本日のディスカッションテストでうまくできた点を2つ述べてください。

Long answer text

---

6. Write 2 things you'd like to improve after taking the discussion test. (本日、ディスカッションテストを受けてみて、伸ばしたいと思うことを2つ書いてください)

Long answer text

---

# Reflections

## Jamie

### What went well

- Increased Reflection-in-Action<sup>1</sup>
- Increased student empathy/support
- Meeting course goals in reduced time
- Rapport building

### What could be done differently

- Peer-reflection & feedback
- Integrating target skill presentation approaches

## Shoko

### What went well

- Reacting to students' needs
- Monitoring students
- Rapport building

### What could be done differently

- Feedback in smaller groups
- Better use of self-study time (Individual idea generation as homework)

<sup>1</sup> Murphy, J. M. (2014). Reflective teaching: Principles & practices. In M. Celce-Murcia, D. Brinton, & M. A. Snow (Eds.), *Teaching English as a second or foreign language* (pp. 613–629). National Geographic Learning.

# Connection

## Jamie

- Focusing on building student rapport regardless of medium
- Helping students understand goals of lesson quickly
- Showing students I am a source of support in navigating a new learning environment
- Delivering lessons effectively and simultaneously reflecting and modifying

## Shoko

- Becoming more open to different approaches
- Applying new approaches to face-to-face class
- Curriculum development

Thank you for watching!  
If you have any questions,  
please contact us:

- Jamie G. Sturges:  
jamie@rikkyo.ac.jp
- Shoko Kita:  
shokokita@rikkyo.ac.jp

