Instructor Guide:
Circling Technique
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Background

There are millions of languages in the world today. It may seem unusual for a person to know more than three languages, or even one language proficiently in his or her lifetime. Learning another language can truly feel daunting, especially with all its rules and grammar or seemingly infinite vocabulary words. Research has shown that it is more effective to learn a language by first understanding meaning and attaching value to it than it is to memorize vocabulary or grammar rules. This instruction will employ the fundamentals of theorist and researcher, Stephen Krashen, who developed a theory called comprehensible input and James Asher’s theory on “total physical response” (TPR). Blaine Ray further applied these theories to a curriculum design for language acquisition. He called his method “teaching proficiency through reading and storytelling” (TPRS). This method has been proven to improve retention and transfer in the process of acquiring language. It is important to note that it takes time and practice to fully acquire a language. Moreover there are multiple steps to Blaine Ray’s TPR Storytelling ®.

*Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling:*

1. Establish Meaning
2. Storytelling
3. Translate and Discuss Extended Reading of the Story (Ray, 2015)

*Techniques Employed When in the TPRS Model*

1. **Circling**
2. Staying in bounds
3. Speaking Slowly
4. Comprehension Checks
5. Pop-up Grammar
6. Personalization
7. Teach to the eyes

This instruction will not provide instruction on the TPRS model. However, this instruction will provide a pedagogical model for one of the critical incident techniques called “circling technique”. It is necessary that the instructor not only know the target language proficiently but also know how to employ these techniques throughout each lesson in the classroom as needed. In practice, not all aspects of each technique will be necessary. However, once the instructor is proficient in the circling technique, it is important to actively listen (Improvement, p. 52) to the students as each lesson or group of students may respond differently.

Circling technique is a set of prescribed questions used when teaching a new language throughout the TPRS method. TPR, TPR Storytelling ® and Krashen’s theory of comprehensible input are developed from basic behaviorist theories of B.F. Skinner and John Watson including conditioning, associations, connects, imitation and reinforcement.

The Behaviorist Pedagogical Model

The pedagogy chosen for this instructor’s guide is indeed a behaviorist model. Behaviorism is a theory developed by B. F. Skinner and John Watson that describes learning from conditioned stimulus and response in the learner’s environment. These theorist implied “that teachers should arrange the environment so that students can respond properly to stimuli” (Schunk, 22). Memory and comprehension is developed by repeating the response to the stimulus continuously over time. In turn the lack of response would result in forgetting. The way stimuli are arranged, presented and reinforced in an environment, effect the learner’s response. Cognitive theory would consider the learner’s beliefs and abilities, whereas behaviorists do not. (Schunk, 22-24).
Furthermore, behaviorist learning requires trial and error. According to Thorndike’s *Educational Psychology* as described by Schunk, “the most fundamental type of learning involves forming associations (connections) between sensory experiences (perceptions of stimuli or events) and neural impulses (responses) that manifest themselves behaviorally.” (Schunk, 73). The more a stimulus is associated with a response, the more learning occurs. Moreover, as the response is reinforced with positive results and associations the more learning is retained. This is a form of what theorist Pavlov called conditioning. Pavlov held that “any perceived stimulus can be conditioned to any response that can be made.” (Schunk, 81) One aspect of conditioning is imitation. Behaviorist hold that imitation is produced by associations and the reinforcement of previously acquired knowledge. The knowledge was introduced, imitated and positively reinforced, therefore encouraging repeated imitation response. (Schunk, 125).

Behaviorist theories described above, influenced theorist the language acquisition theories of James Asher, Stephen Krashen and Blaine Ray. These theorists developed models of learning that foreign language teachers use in today’s classrooms.

**Theory Synopsis**

Stephen Krashen introduced and explained his theory about language acquisition and comprehensible input in his nearly 500 papers on the subject. Krashen explains the origins of his theory by describing his search for effective instruction.

> “Even meaningful and communicative drills may have their limitations, however. Even if they manage to hit the "next" structure (i + 1), which is unlikely for all students in a given class, they may fail to provide enough input or be natural enough for language acquisition. Perhaps the correct generalization is that the best activities are those that are natural, interesting, and understood. When these requirements are met, and where there is a great deal of input of this
nature, it may be the case that i +1 will "naturally" be covered and reviewed many times over, and progress in language acquisition will result.” (Krashen, 1981, p. 104)

Krashen here is analyzing the method of instructor-led instruction that will produce a positive response and successful transfer of knowledge. He is influenced by Skinner and Watson’s behavioristic perspective of language acquisition where, “language acquisition is a result of a set of habits” and language input (Kiymazarslan, 2011). In the above quotation, Krashen describes the ideal activity to engage in with a student that would produce language and comprehension. The key word here is input. Behaviorist believe that language acquisition of the mother tongue (L1) as well as the second language (L2) requires language input from the environment, positive reinforcement, repetition and imitation. (Kiymazarslan, 2011). Krashen agreed and developed what he called comprehensible input.

Krashen was also influenced by James Asher who developed the theory called total physical response (TPR). The instructor initiates a physical stimulus either with an object or through physical action associated with the word in the second language. The learner response to the observed behavior is a conditioned response to imitate until comprehension is achieved. Asher’s research compares several groups of learners and how their responses effected retention. He found that “subjects who applied the total physical response technique as in the Act-Act Group and the Observe-Act Group were dramatically higher in retention, usually beyond the .001 level, than any group of people who tried to translate.” (13, Asher, Total Physical Response Approach) His theory was called total physical response (TPR). It was clear to him that those involved in connecting a stimulus to a response by through associations in observation or being physically involved in response, retained more knowledge then those who practiced word to word translation through memorization.

All these theorist were key in helping Blaine Ray develop a curriculum for teaching called teaching proficiency through reading and storytelling (TPRS or TPR Storytelling ®). Ray uses stimulus and
response, imitation, repetition, comprehensible input and reinforcement in his curriculum to lead teachers today in teaching a second language. Ray employs the learners’ responses to language input to determine comprehension and transfer.

**Behavior Modeling and Methodology Components**

The six components of behavior modeling methodology are described and applied to the instructor guide below.

1. **Prescribed critical steps/behavior**
   
a. **Definition:** After identifying a subject matter expert (SME), the instructional designer gathers information from the SME and other reliable resources to establish the essential steps of behavior to execute this instruction accurately and effectively. The Critical Incident Technique, according to John Flanagan from the Institute for Research and University of Pittsburg, “To be critical, an incident must occur in a situation where the purpose or intent of the act seems fairly clear to the observer and where its consequences are sufficiently definite to leave little doubt concerning its effects.” (Flanagan, 1953)

b. **Application:** For this instructor guide, the SME is defined as the person who has received instruction prior to the workshop and has proficient understand of TPRS, Circling and their target language. This person will demonstrate transfer by instructing other foreign language instructors about circling. The critical steps for circling are described in step B when the SME describes the process for the circling technique. Moreover the steps the SME should take is described in the full instructions of the instructor guide.

2. **Critical Model**
a. **Definition:** A critical model is a demonstration of the prescribed critical steps accurately. The model should demonstrate the behavior in a context that most accurately reflects the context of the desired behavior. This allows the instruction to be instructor lead instead of student led.

b. **Application:** The lesson to the Foreign Language Instructors (FLIs) is given in a class from and is modeled by the SME. As mentioned in the instructor guide, if the SME is unable to model the circling technique, videos of other teachers teaching in their own classrooms will serve as the critical model to imitate.

### 3. Skill Practice Exercises

a. **Definition:** Skills and Practice Exercises allow for stimulus and response to occur in repetition to create transfer of knowledge. The stimulus is the exercise and the students’ response allows for trial and error, positive and negative reinforcement.

b. **Application:** In this instructor guide, step F is an example of skills and practice. FLIs will be given a job aid chart with the steps of circling and then asked to produce sample questions for each step. The activity that follows will determine if transfer has occurred and if their trial was truly a success or an error.

### 4. Specific Feedback and Social Reinforcement

a. **Definition:** Specific feedback is a response given to the learners after they have performed the critical steps of behavior before their peers. Feedback can be either negative or positive. Preforming in social environment allows for the learner to understand the behavior in context. Moreover the context and feedback will reinforce learning and discourage error.
b. **Application**: Step G in the instructor guide allows the FLIs to further practice before their peers and receive feedback on their performance. It is encouraged to take notes for better retention and future reinforcement of the feedback given.

5. **Transfer Strategies**

   a. **Definition**: Transfer is evidence that the skill has been acquired proficiently enough to produce it again in the original or new context. Higher level transfer will allow for creative thinking and implementation of the skill.

   b. **Application**: Transfer is assessed during the workshop in Step F-I of the instructor guide in the various ways the FLIs are asked to produce the material (writing, question and answer, performance in groups and assessment). Furthermore, transfer is assessed through an additional peer review in the context of the FLIs’ school classrooms with their own students. Personal and staff feedback will be given to determine if they will be the next SME workshop instructor on this topic. This is a positive reinforcement for their successful performance.

6. **On the Job Reinforcement**

   a. **Definition**: On the job reinforcement usually takes the form of a job aid. This allows for quick recall of the summarized instructions given. Once transfer has occurred, the information will be stored in long term memory and a job aid may not be needed.

   b. **Application**: This instruction’s job aid is provided in the form of a chart with examples seen in Appendix A.
INSTRUCTOR GUIDE

Introduction

Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS) has three main steps:

1. Establish Meaning
2. Storytelling
3. Translate and Discuss Extended Reading of the Story (Ray, 2015)

Techniques Employed When in the TPRS Model

1. **Circling**

2. Staying in bounds
3. Speaking Slowly
4. Comprehension Checks
5. Pop-up Grammar
6. Personalization
7. Teach to the eyes

In order to effectively perform the steps of TPRS, the instructor will need to employ several of these techniques throughout the lessons. These techniques are used to check for student engagement and comprehension in the effort of making the classroom an authentic place for language acquisition. This instruction is specifically designed to teach how to use the technique of asking questions called circling. The circling technique is applied most commonly in the storytelling phase of the lesson once meaning has been established. This instruction will not provide instruction on the TPRS model. However, this instruction will provide a pedagogical model for one of the critical incident techniques called the circling technique.
Definition of Circling

Circling is a pedagogical method of using a prescribed series of questions in the target language about a statement in the target language (Bex, 2015)

Audience

The audience for this instruction is any language instructor fluent in the target language who is teaching a student(s) the target language. The student(s) they teach is (are) new to the language. At the point where circling is employed in the lesson however, vocabulary has been assigned meaning in the target language. Language acquisition, as in most learning, should be age appropriate. Therefore, it is important to develop a curriculum that is comprehensible to the students.

Purpose

“Circling is used to provide students with contextualized repetition of target structures.” (Bex, 2015)

When a target structure, such as vocabulary, is repeated in context of its meaning and use, the student has the opportunity to understand and retain it when it is heard or read. Varied research has been done to conclude that language learners need over 70 repetitions in order to acquire language in long term memory. Value plays a role as well. The higher the value of the structure to the learner, the fewer reinforcement or repetition is needed. (Bex, 2015)

Prerequisite

For the End Classroom with Language Learners

It is important that the students be introduced to the language and are demonstrating comprehension throughout the lesson and have established meaning to the vocabulary being taught for that lesson.
Instructors are required to be familiar with TPRS and must be fluent in the target language. The instructor must be able to follow the three steps of TPRS in order. Moreover, it is important that the students be exposed to accurate and authentic language in order to acquire the language effectively.

**For the SMEs Teaching Foreign Language Instructors about Circling**

It is beneficial that the SME is fluent in a language that is different from those attending the workshop on circling. Given that is possible, the SME will have the opportunity to be the primary critical model for this instructor guide. If this is not possible, the SME should refer to the video resources as the primary critical model for this instructor guide.

**Objectives**

At the end of this lesson the Foreign Language Instructor will be able to:

1. Understand the circling technique of asking questions
2. See the circling technique demonstrated
3. Preform the circling technique in the target language proficiently

By the end of this instruction, the foreign language instructors’ proficiency in the circling technique will allow them to employ this skill throughout each lesson in the classroom as needed. In practice, not all aspects of each technique will be necessary. However, once the instructor is proficient in the circling technique, it is important to actively listen to the students as each lesson or group of students may respond differently.

**Context**

The foreign language instructors (FLIs) will be taught in a classroom where audio/video and the internet is present. FLIs will be taught in small groups no larger than 15 in order to accommodate for group
participation in the workshop. The workshop should take between 88-133 minutes. It is advised to give about a 5-10 minute break halfway through the steps, however this is at the SME’s discretion.

Materials Resources for the Foreign Language Instructor

- For the lesson the instructor will need a list of vocabulary used for the assignment
- A chart is provided in Appendix A as a job aid demonstrating a summary of the steps of the circling technique
- The following are videos of other teachers modeling this in live classrooms:
  a. Circling technique in a Sr. Wein’s Spanish Class with a group of second graders in Chesterfield County school in Virginia
     i. Prerequisite - TPRS Establishing Meaning: https://youtu.be/-nXTmPntLcM
     ii. TPRS Circling Technique Part 1: https://youtu.be/reJN7n1V-cM
     iii. TPRS Circling Technique Part 2: https://youtu.be/oxUBezSMJk
  b. Circling in a Spanish high school class on clothing vocabulary:
     https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VRCFl1mrHKs
  c. Circling in the context of Storytelling in Spanish:
     https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Eq1vaaxFLA&
- It may be helpful to have other props related to your lesson that can demonstrate your vocabulary to check for comprehension.

Instructions for SMEs Giving the Circling Workshop to FLIs

A. The subject matter expert (SME) in TPRS and the circling technique will recall the FLIs memory on the TPRS model (5 minutes)
B. The SME will introduce the circling technique with a definition and verbal explanation of the technique. (5 minutes)
C. The SME will play following YouTube video of Stephen Krashen explaining and demonstrating the theory himself: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VjAHPl1ACmQ (video is about 3 minutes long)

D. The SME will introduce and demonstrate the Instruction for the Circling Technique with the FLIs in a language unfamiliar to the FLIs in the room. If this is not possible, the SME should use the video resources provided in this instructor guide. The video resources may also be used to augment the SME as a critical model to reinforce comprehension through repetition. (15-45 minutes depending on whether or not the SME shows and discusses the video resources)

E. If the videos were used, the SME will articulate and discuss the variations in practice seen in the videos.

F. FLI’s will be given the job aid as seen in Appendix A and asked to give an example of each step by writing a question in that style. Those who are able to produce accurate examples will do well in the following exercise and receive positive feedback from their peers and the SME. Those who don’t will receive negative feedback from the SME and their peers. (5 minutes)

G. The FLIs will break up into teams and take turns practicing circling in their target language to their small group. Groups should contain about 3 FLIs. This lesson is effective if the FLIs all speak the same language. This allows the students to begin right at circling without having to introduce vocabulary and establish meaning. This exercise is still possible if the FLIs speak different languages. They would simply have to employ the “Establishing Meaning” step in the TPRS method with which they should already be familiar. At the end of each FLIs’ turn, others in their group are encouraged to give feedback and discuss ways of executing circling more effectively. Note taking is encouraged to reinforce memory. (This should take about 10 minutes per person and 5 minutes of feedback or 15 minutes with the added step with 5 minutes of feedback. For a total of 45 minutes to 1 hour)
H. At this point the SME asks the FLIs to put away their job aid and attempt to recall the steps for circling on paper (about 5 minutes)

I. Then the SME reviews the steps with the class by asking leading questions about the steps and the critical methods employed throughout, for example, repetition. (about 5 minutes)

How Learning Will Be Assessed

Foreign language instructors will be assessed during the lesson through modes described in steps F-I. Moreover, the FLIs will be asked to return to their schools and preform TPRS and specifically the circling technique in their own classrooms and give personal and staff feedback on how the lesson went. The lesson should take between 10-15 minutes. The personal reflections and staff feedback will be returned to the SMEs for research and evaluation purposes. For those who display positive and proficient transfer, they will be invited to teach future workshops.

Instructions on Circling Technique

1. Make a positive statement related to the vocabulary being taught in the target language. There should only be one new target structure introduced in the statement.

2. Ask a question in the target language about the statement that has a positive answer (yes) making sure to repeat the vocabulary instead of referencing it with pronouns, for example. Moreover, be sure to use vocabulary that has been previously introduced.

3. Restate the original statements correctly in the target language after every question.

4. Ask a question with a negative answer (no) in the target language.

5. Restate the original statements correctly in the target language after every question.

6. Restate the negative statement and restate the positive statement in the target language.

7. Ask comparative questions in the target language using either/or. It is helpful to use vocabulary and their opposites. Be sure to use vocabulary in which the students are familiar.
8. Restate the original statements correctly in the target language after every question.

9. Ask open-ended questions in the target language that start with who, what, where, why and how, for example, within the bounds of the students’ vocabulary and comprehension.

10. Restate the original statements in the target language after every question.

Since the instructors are fluent in their language, a script is unnecessary, however there is a job aid created by Martina Bex and adapted from Laure Clarcq in Appendix A of this Instructor Guide (Bex, 2015).
Summary of Theories and Application

Circling is a technique employed in Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS) is a method of teaching a new language developed by Blaine Ray based on Stephen Krashen’s theory of comprehensible input and language acquisition.

Circling itself is a method of asking questions in order to produce a language response and in turn language acquisition. As quoted previously, Stephen Krashen’s theory of comprehensible input provides the avenue to achieve this. He explained that if a stimulus is given where the answer is provided, it simply requires a short yes or no response. If options are given then the response requires language. The language however is imitated from previously acquired associations. See example in the figure below.

\[\begin{array}{l}
\text{Adult} \\
\text{Is this your ball?} \\
\text{What colour is your ball?} \\
\text{Is that your doggy?} \\
\text{Is that your doggy or Jim's doggy?}
\end{array} \quad \begin{array}{l}
\text{Paul} \\
\text{Yeah.} \\
\text{(no answer)} \\
\text{Yeah.} \\
\text{Jim's doggy.} \\
\text{(Huang, cited in Wagner-Gough, 1975)}
\end{array}\]

*Figure 1*

This series of questioning inspired Ray to develop the circling technique seen in the instructors guide. As expressed in the instructors guide, it is important to assign meaning or association to new ideas in order to draw connections. When the connections are repeated the associations are reinforced. This is why it is crucial to repeat the correct responses to the questions in the circling technique. The more often the statements using the target language vocabulary, the more the learner is able to comprehend, recall to memory and transfer to other structures and/or environments.

Moreover, it was important to apply these theories to the instructor guide as well as to the given instruction for the circling technique. As seen in the instructor guide, the instruction requires stimulus
and response activities, such as the exercises in step F and G. Practicing the circling technique allows for repetition of the required response. As the workshop comes tests for correct responses, it requires the FLIs to exercise trial and error in different situations. Transfer, according to a behaviorist, means that the same response will result as a result of a similar stimulus in a different setting. This is applied even further in the assessment at the end of the workshop. The FLIs are asked to apply what they learned in the workshop with their students in their own classrooms.

In practice, the circling technique as well as the other techniques employed in TPRS, are not always necessary in the lesson. It is up to the instructor who, hopefully at this point, would have mastery of the skills and be able to plan to use them as needed in the context of a live class.
# CIRCLING TEMPLATE

*Adapted from Laurie Clarq*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUBJECT</th>
<th>VERB</th>
<th>OBJECT ETC</th>
<th>EXPLANATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>eats</td>
<td>a pizza</td>
<td>Make a statement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does John</td>
<td>eat</td>
<td>a pizza?</td>
<td>Ask a question to which the answer is YES!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does Bob</td>
<td>eat</td>
<td>a pizza?</td>
<td>Ask questions to which the answer is NO by substituting other subjects, verbs, and objects (prepositions, etc.).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the French teacher</td>
<td>eat</td>
<td>a pizza?</td>
<td>Follow them up with “either/or” questions (ex: Does John drop a pizza or does John eat a pizza?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does John</td>
<td>throw</td>
<td>a pizza?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does John</td>
<td>sell</td>
<td>a pizza?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does John</td>
<td>drop</td>
<td>a pizza?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHEN does John eat a pizza?</td>
<td>WHY does John eat a pizza?</td>
<td>WITH WHOM does John eat a pizza?</td>
<td>HOW does John eat a pizza?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Remember to always re-state the original statement correctly after each question. For example, T: “Does John eat M&M’s?” S: “NO!” T: “John does not eat M&M’s; John eats pizza!”

Resource Presented at AFLA 2012 by Martina Bex, Victoria Gellert, and Michele Whaley

[www.martinabex.com](http://www.martinabex.com) • [www.afla-ak.org](http://www.afla-ak.org)
References


