

# Making Jigsaw Activities Using Newspaper Articles

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## Introduction

Newspaper articles have long been a staple item in both reading and conversation classes because they are generally short, predictable in style, timely in content, and easy to find and use. However, the traditional method of having students read silently, answer comprehension questions, and then discuss an article can become boring to both students and teachers. An alternative to this traditional approach is turning articles into jigsaw activities, in which any one student only has a portion of the information needed to complete a task.

The advantage of jigsaw activities is that students must depend on each other for their information, so they must interact to accomplish a given task. The technique described below for making jigsaw activities from newspaper articles structures activities so that students **read** the text, **hear** the text, **master new vocabulary**, **paraphrase**, and **interact at all stages** of the activity (not at just the discussion stage, as in the traditional approach). In my experience, pre-intermediate to advanced students have almost all preferred using jigsaw newspaper articles to the traditional approach. The general procedure described below can be used with other types of texts as well as with newspaper articles. The description below is for a discussion class, but I have also used it with introductory sections of chapters in books as a warm-up activity for long texts. (For an informative discussion of the making and using of jigsaw activities, see the chapter devoted to it in C. Kessler's (1992) *Cooperative Language Learning: A Teacher's Resource Book*, published by

Prentice Hall Regents).

## Preparation

(Materials: a newspaper article, scissors, paste/glue/tape, prepared handouts with enough space to paste on sections of the article (see Fig. 1), and a complete copy of the article)

Select a newspaper article to suit your teaching purpose and student level. Decide how many sections into which you will divide all or part of it. (I recommend three, and no more than 4 sections, or the second group activity (see Procedure below) becomes time consuming.) If possible, enlarge it on a photocopying machine to make it easier for students to read and for you to cut and paste. Generally you will want to omit the first paragraph of an average article because it contains all the key information. Also omit any other sections which give away too much information. The goal is to select sections that 1) have *just enough* information to arouse the student's interest in the rest of the story, 2) contain *some* information that overlaps with other sections **but also** 3) contain important information **not** found in other sections. Dividing the article up according to these criteria presents information in a way that forces students to develop and share hypotheses and to depend on others for information. Thus, the task of reading becomes an interactive problem-solving activity.

Next, prepare a handout sheet with instructions for doing the activity (see Figure 1). The sheet should have enough blank space for the section of the article to be attached. Label each sheet differently as a way of making sure students in the first group activity (see Procedure below) have the same handout. I recommend using colors (e.g. blue, red and green) as labels instead of numbers or letters. When numbers (1, 2 and 3) or letters (A, B and C) are used, students often assume that they indicate the order in which the sections appear in the original article. Using colors avoids this problem. Try to keep the handout as general as possible so you can use it for a variety of articles, and keep master copies, *sans* article, for future use.

## Procedure

(Total Time: 35-60 minutes, depending on student level and the difficulty of the article)

### First Group Activity (Time: 10-20 minutes)

1. Divide the class into 3 or four groups, depending on how many sections you have selected from the newspaper article. (More than four sections usually takes too much time.) Give the same section of the article to each member of a particular group.
2. Have the students read the instructions carefully, noting the rules. Stress that for them to benefit most from the activity, they should go through their section of the article together until they are all satisfied that they understand it and can explain it to others. Insisting that they practice paraphrasing it lets them (and you) check their understanding of the section. Also, make sure they can explain all the vocabulary .
3. As a group, have the students write out two questions they would like to ask others to gain a better understanding of the entire article. Some groups may be slower at this than others. If time is short, be ready to either accept only one question or to suggest a few. **Warning:** In their questions students often refer to things like this problem or the man which have context only in reference to their section of text. Other students will not understand what they are referring to. You may need to correct vague questions and have them clarify what the pronouns refer to in their questions.

### Combined Group Activity (Time: 15-25 minutes)

1. When you feel the students are ready, have them form new groups with at least one member of each of the other groups. (For example, combine a member from the red, blue and green groups. Depending on class size, you may need to have more than three students to a group, and may have two members of the same first group (e.g. two blues ) together.) **Warn them not to show their papers to the members of the new group.** Explain that they are expected to negotiate everything orally.
2. Have the students take turns reading, paraphrasing, explaining, and answering questions about their sections, as well as asking the questions they

wrote down in their previous groups.

Encourage them to stop each other, ask questions, and do whatever is needed to come to a conclusion about what the entire article is about, and to discuss any interpretations and hypotheses that come to mind.

3. When the students feel they understand the article as well as they can, have them write down a brief description of what the article is about. This needn't (and shouldn't) take too much time. If you are running out of time, you may want to skip it.

## | **Full Class Discussion and Wrap-up**

(Time: 10-15 minutes)

1. With students remaining in the combined discussion group, ask someone from each group to explain what they think the article is about and any other important points or questions that came up as they tried to piece the article back together again. Sometimes groups will have very different ideas about certain points, and this can be exploited for discussion purposes (or to point out where comprehension broke down).
2. Distribute copies of the complete article. You may want to read it aloud.
3. At this point you can have a full class discussion of the article. Hopefully, the one you choose will lend itself to spinoff discussions of related topics.

## **Conclusion**

While I have had a few students who did not care for this technique, the general response to it from both lower-level and higher-level students has been overwhelmingly positive. Students say they appreciate the time spent negotiating the text because it helps prepare them better to discuss it, and because it is more interesting than just reading and discussing articles. As a teacher, I like using such articles because students generally enjoy them, and because they are easy to prepare once the initial handouts are made.

Some final advice. Don't give up if things go a little rough the first time you

try this technique. As with anything new, students may not understand at first what they are doing and why they are doing it. In the end, most enjoy it. Good luck!

## Figure 1.

Sample handout page.

Blue Group

### **PART 1: Single Group Reading and Discussion**

Part of a newspaper article is presented below. You must **understand it completely** because later you will share the information with people in other groups. You should

1) read it through and discuss it, being sure you understand the content and all vocabulary, 2) practice **paraphrasing** it and, 3) write out two questions you want to ask members of the other groups to get a fuller understanding of the entire article.

**(Attach a section of the newspaper article here)**

Questions: What would you like to know from other groups to help you understand this article better? As a group, think of two questions to ask the others.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

### **Part 2: Combined Group Discussion**

Leave your original group and **form a new group** with a member from each of the other groups. You should 1) read your section to them once or twice so they can hear the original, 2) answer any questions they have and explain any

vocabulary they don't know and, 3) paraphrase your section so they can check their understanding. Continue like this until everybody has shared their information. Finally, as a group, decide what you think the whole article is about and write your ideas down below. Remember, **DON'T SHOW YOUR SECTION TO YOUR NEW PARTNERS!**

We think this article

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