

ACTION-ORIENTED TASKS: The Basics

The motivation to communicate is enhanced through having a genuine purpose: "a task to be accomplished, a problem to be resolved, an obligation to be fulfilled, or an objective to be achieved." Based on CEFR (2001), p. 10

What makes a task action-oriented?

1. The situation is authentic
2. There is a task to be completed
3. It's open-ended
4. It involves an interaction (meaningful communication!)

According to...

A Guide to Reflective Practice for Core French Teachers: The Action-Oriented Approach:

- ❖ Action-oriented tasks are purposeful acts set in a context that students could face in everyday life in a variety of situations. These tasks are open-ended and complex, requiring a variety of knowledge and skills, and there are many possible paths leading to attaining the specific end goal. To accomplish these action-oriented tasks, students require knowledge of the language and appropriate use of that language within a given cultural and social context. Each of these social tasks consists of *acts of speech (les actes de paroles)*, or words and groups of words that enable them to communicate for a specific purpose in a real-life interaction. Examples include offering an apology, greeting, request, complaint, invitation, compliment, or refusal.
- ❖ Action-oriented tasks actively involve learners in meaningful communication, are relevant and challenging but feasible, and have identifiable outcomes which are real and practical. Students can track their progress in developing language skills by their ability to carry out realistic tasks ("I can ask for details about a product at an electronics store and inquire if it can be placed on hold using the verbs *vouloir*, *devoir*, and *prendre* correctly") rather than their ability to complete grammar quizzes on verbs ("I can conjugate the irregular verbs *vouloir*, *devoir* and *prendre* in the present and conditional tenses"). Learning how to get something done *in French* empowers students.
- ❖ When Core French teachers adopt the action-oriented approach, students are able to demonstrate what they can do in French as well as what they know about French language structures. The action-oriented approach has a clear focus on second language learning as an active process in which students shape the nature of their language interactions. Action-oriented, task-based instruction and active learning are also often linked with discussions and research on learner autonomy.
- ❖ David Little (2006) notes that "The development of autonomy in language learning is governed by three basic pedagogical principles: learner involvement ... learner reflection ... and appropriate target language." (pp. 3-4)

The complete guide can be found at - <http://bit.ly/a-o-tasks>

According to *A Guide to Reflective Practice for Core French Teachers: Oral Proficiency*:

- ❖ The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) highlights the action-oriented approach, student self-assessment, the use of “can-do” statements, and the development of language skills that are relevant to authentic situations. The CEFR stresses the importance of developing oral proficiency and differentiates between oral production and oral interaction. The framework endorses an attitude that values language learners’ ability to communicate while gradually increasing their accuracy with practice over time. In the early stages of language learning, the goal is to communicate the intended message in the target language, recognizing that errors in form will be evident. Language learners are encouraged to develop and use skills related to the functions of language rather than to learn *about* the language.
- ❖ As described by Puren, the **action-oriented approach** has evolved from and builds upon the characteristics of the communicative approach by considering the learners as social actors who interact for a genuine purpose such as presenting a convincing argument, making a purchase, confirming travel arrangements, or discussing current events. Before students start any work, the teacher first ensures that they have a foundation of French language skills and communication strategies needed for beginning the task. While students work collaboratively, the teacher provides feedback to build their language skills. (p. 3)

The complete guide can be found at - <http://bit.ly/or-prof>

Resources (Presenter is not affiliated with any of these products)

Free resources:

- *A Guide to Reflective Practice for Core French Teachers: The Action-Oriented Approach* (Mentioned above) <http://bit.ly/a-o-tasks>
- *A Guide to Reflective Practice for Core French Teachers: Oral Proficiency* (Mentioned above) <http://bit.ly/or-prof>
- From Communicative to Action-Oriented: A Research Pathway (Chapter 5 includes examples) <http://bit.ly/fromctoao>

Resources available for purchase:

- AIM : CEFR Action-Oriented Tasks Resources Book (\$89) <http://bit.ly/aimaotasks>
- CASLT Assessment in Action: A CEFR-based Toolkit for FSL Teachers (\$18 Members, \$30 Non-Members – Available in Level A or B) <http://bit.ly/casлтаат>

Sample Action-Oriented Tasks

These examples of action-oriented tasks are set in a range of authentic situations to engage students in achieving various learning goals.

Learning Goal	Authentic Situation	Action-Oriented Task
	<i>When would this occur in real life?</i>	<i>What is the purpose? What will be accomplished?</i>
I am learning to describe my family.	Showing photos of my family to a friend and identifying each person	You have just set up an account on a social networking site. Discuss with a friend who lives in Quebec which family photos to upload. Explain your choices.
	Answering questions from a French exchange student about my family members	You have enrolled in an exchange program and are speaking to your French-speaking partner on the phone for the first time. This person will be staying with you next month. Answer the exchange student's questions about your family.
	Buying a gift for a family member and having to describe the person to the sales assistant	You are in a department store and are having trouble finding the perfect gift for a family member. Describe the person to the French-speaking sales assistant, and answer questions about his/her likes and dislikes.
	Applying to be on a reality TV show	You are applying for your family to star in a reality TV show called "Canada's Most Talented Family." Film a short video to describe your family to the French producers.
I am learning to ask and answer simple questions.	Meeting a new classmate on the first day of school	A teacher asks you to greet a new French student and to give a tour of the school. Help this person feel at home by answering questions about the school.
	Asking a friend to borrow missing school supplies	You have arrived in French class only to discover that you left your backpack at home. Ask three friends questions about your schedule for the day and whether they can lend you the materials you need to get through the day.
I am learning to make simple purchases.	Buying items at a convenience store	You are driving to Québec City for a family vacation and you stop for gas on the way. Go into the convenience store to buy some supplies for the journey. Ask the sales assistant for help finding these items. Discuss the price, quantity, and how you will pay for them.
	Ordering a pizza by phone	You and some friends are on an overnight trip to a French community. You have decided to order pizza. Phone in an order for three pizzas, making sure that they each have very different toppings to accommodate your friends' diverse tastes. Discuss the price, quantity, payment options, and how each person contributes.
I am learning to set a date for a meeting, to talk about dates and times, and to give directions.	Arranging to see a movie with friends	Your best friend has French-speaking cousins who are visiting from Montreal and the group is having trouble agreeing on the details for going to a movie. Talk to them to decide when and where you will meet, how you will get to the theatre, and what movie you will see.
I am learning to express my likes and dislikes.	Describing what you would like to receive as a birthday gift	A French-speaking friend of your family whom you have not seen for a long time phones to ask what you would like for your birthday. She seems to think that you still like the same things you did when you were five years old. Give her three or four ideas of what you would really like to receive as a gift. Explain your choices.

Learning Goal	Authentic Situation	Action-Oriented Task
	<i>When would this occur in real life?</i>	<i>What is the purpose? What will be accomplished?</i>
I am learning to request and follow detailed directions.	Travelling in a French-speaking area	You are planning a visit to the Biodôme in Montréal. You go to an Info-touriste location and ask for directions using the visitor's guide/map. On the way to the Biodôme, you check these directions with a passerby.
		You are in a train station (or an airport) and you want to find an ice cream shop. You ask a person at the information kiosk how to find your destination. A little later, a French tourist sees you with your ice cream and asks you for the same directions. Explain how to get there.
		You are going to visit a friend who lives in residence on a university campus in the Acadian region of New Brunswick. You have found the university campus, but are having trouble locating the residence building. You stop a group of students to ask for directions.
I am learning to give or seek personal views and opinions in informal discussions with friends.	Discussing movies, books, music, etc.	You are visiting a friend in Quebec City and would like to see a movie this week. The friend wants to see an action film, and you would prefer a comedy. Have a discussion, giving your opinions and the reasons for them.
	Looking for others' input before making a purchase	You email some French-speaking friends to find out what kinds of phones and data plans they have and their opinions of the service offered by the various phone companies. Share the information with your parents and convince them to help you pay for the data plan.
I am learning to agree and disagree politely with someone.	Rejecting a meal in a restaurant	You ordered a vegetarian pasta in a French restaurant, but the server brings you meat lasagna, insists it is what you have ordered, and argues that it is delicious. Politely convince the server to bring the meal you ordered.
I am learning to ask someone to clarify or elaborate on what they have just said.	Buying additional components for your computer	You notice signs for a sale and decide to purchase components or software for your computer while on a student exchange. You are following the explanation of the French-speaking salesperson, but there are some particular words which you do not recognize. Ask the salesperson for an explanation of the unfamiliar terms.
I am learning to make myself understood even when I don't know the exact word.	Making a purchase at the garden store	You are visiting relatives in a small Québec town and would like to buy a particular plant as a thank-you gift. You don't know the correct name of the plant, but you know what it looks like. Describe what you are looking for to the French-speaking salesperson.
I am learning to write to express an opinion.	Writing to a newspaper editor	A developer would like to build a strip mall where there is currently a park in which many children and their families play. Write a letter to the editor of the local French newspaper giving reasons why the park and its green space should be preserved.
	Completing a survey	You and your family have completed a stay at a hotel in Québec. You are filling in the customer satisfaction survey before you leave.

Curriculum Overall Expectation:

Learning Goal:

Situation:

Primary Action-Oriented Task	Junior Action-Oriented Task

Additional tasks to support:

Structures and/or functional language: