activity, to be copied by the teacher, is included in Part 2 of
the book.

*Time in minutes*  This gives a rough idea of how long the
activity takes if it is done in the way described with an
average-sized class (15–25 students).

The main part of each section consists of detailed
descriptions of the activities, including information on the
language practised and the educational aims being pursued,
as well as hints on modifying the procedure. The procedure
itself is usually explained in several steps.

Part 2 contains worksheets for 47 activities; these activities
have been indicated in all the tables. There is also an
alphabetical list of all the activities (on p. 188) with notes on
different aspects, i.e. materials, organisation, time, aims/task
for each one. Indexes of the language practised and the level
of the activities follow (on p. 193). A list of the speech acts
needed for certain activities (on p. 194) concludes Part 2,
together with the bibliography. The latter is not restricted to
the titles of the books mentioned but also includes relevant
publications where further ideas on communicative exercises
can be found.

1.2 Some basic considerations

The 123 activities in this book do not constitute a graded
programme which should be taught step by step. The book’s
main function lies in offering many different kinds of
exercises to complement traditional foreign language lessons
and make them more interesting and lively. I have been
guided by several principles in developing and selecting the
activities, and I would like to discuss these briefly in turn:
message-oriented communication, learner-centred activities,
active learning, cooperation and empathy.

The term *message-oriented communication* (in the German
original ‘mitteilungsbezogene Kommunikation’) was coined
by Black and Butzkamm (1977). They use it to refer to those
rare and precious moments in foreign language teaching
when the target language is actually used as a means of
communication. A prime instance of this use is classroom
discourse, i.e. getting things done in the lesson. Sometimes
real communicative situations develop spontaneously, as in
exchanging comments on last night’s TV programme or
someone's new haircut. The majority of ordinary language teaching situations before reaching an advanced level, however, are geared towards language-oriented communication, or what Rivers calls 'skill-getting': they make use of the foreign language mainly in structural exercises and predetermined responses by the learners.

Since foreign language teaching should help students achieve some kind of communicative skill in the foreign language, all situations in which real communication occurs naturally have to be taken advantage of and many more suitable ones have to be created.

Two devices help the teacher in making up communicative activities: information gap and opinion gap. Information-gap exercises force the participants to exchange information in order to find a solution (e.g. reconstitute a text, solve a puzzle, write a summary). Examples of information-gap exercises can be found in sections 2.3 Guessing games, 2.4 Jigsaw tasks and 3.5 Problem-solving activities. Opinion gaps are created by exercises incorporating controversial texts or ideas, which require the participants to describe and perhaps defend their views on these ideas. Another type of opinion-gap activity can be organised by letting the participants share their feelings about an experience they have in common. Opinion-gap activities of the first type are included in sections 3.1 Ranking exercises, 3.3 Values clarification techniques and 3.4 Thinking strategies; those of the second type are to be found in section 3.2 Discussion games.

Differences of opinion can either be the focus of a discussion, as in activity No. 48 Guide, or an obstacle to be overcome so that a consensus can be reached (e.g. No. 73 Awards).

By applying the principles of information gap and opinion gap to suitable traditional exercises the teacher can change them into more challenging communicative situations. Thus the well-known procedure at beginner's level of having students describe each other's appearance is transformed into a communicative activity as soon as an element of guessing (information gap) is introduced (see No. 11 Back to back). However, not all exercises can be spruced up like this. Manipulative drills that have no real topic have to remain as they are. Information and opinion-gap exercises have to have some content worth talking about. Students do not want to discuss trivia; the interest which is aroused by the structure of the activity may be reduced or increased by the topic.

Many of the activities are concerned with the learners
Some basic considerations

themselves. Their feelings and ideas are the focal point of these exercises, around which a lot of their foreign language activity revolves. For learners who are studying English in a non-English-speaking setting it is very important to experience real communicative situations in which they learn to express their own views and attitudes, and in which they are taken seriously as people. Traditional textbook exercises—however necessary and useful they may be for pre-communicative grammar practice—do not as a rule forge a link between the learners and the foreign language in such a way that the learners identify with it. Meaningful activities on a personal level can be a step towards this identification, which improves performance and generates interest. And, of course, talking about something which affects them personally is eminently motivating for students.

Furthermore, learning a foreign language is not just a matter of memorising a different set of names for the things around us; it is also an educational experience. Since our language is closely linked with our personality and culture, why not use the process of acquiring a new language to gain further insights into our personality and culture? This does not mean that students of a foreign language should submit to psychological exercises or probing interviews, but simply that, for example, learning to talk about their likes and dislikes may bring about a greater awareness of their values and aims in life. A number of activities adapted from ‘values clarification’ theory have been included with this purpose in mind (see section 3.3).

Learning is more effective if the learners are actively involved in the process. The degree of learner activity depends, among other things, on the type of material they are working on. The students’ curiosity can be aroused by texts or pictures containing discrepancies or mistakes, or by missing or muddled information, and this curiosity leads to the wish to find out, to put right or to complete. Learner activity in a more literal sense of the word can also imply doing and making things; for example, producing a radio programme (as in No. 118) forces the students to read, write and talk in the foreign language as well as letting them ‘play’ with tape recorders, sound effects and music. Setting up an opinion poll in the classroom (as in No. 15) is a second, less ambitious vehicle for active learner participation; it makes students interview each other, it literally gets them out of their seats and—this is very important—it culminates in a
Introduction

final product which everybody has helped to produce. Further devices to make learners more active are games (see section 2.3 Guessing games), fun and imagination (e.g. No. 5 Trademark, No. 87 Brainstorming) and group puzzles (e.g. No. 102 Friendly Biscuits Inc.).

Activities for practising a foreign language have left the narrow path of purely structural and lexical training and have expanded into the fields of values education and personality building. The impact of foreign language learning on the shaping of the learner’s personality is slowly being recognised. That is why foreign language teaching — just like many other subjects — plays an important part in education towards cooperation and empathy. As teachers we would like our students to be sensitive towards the feelings of others and share their worries and joys. A lot of teaching/learning situations, however, never get beyond a rational and fact-oriented stage. That is why it seems important to provide at least a few instances focusing on the sharing of feelings and ideas. Jigsaw tasks (see 2.4), in particular, demonstrate to the learners that cooperation is necessary. Many of the activities included in this book focus on the participants’ personalities and help build an atmosphere of mutual understanding.

Quite an important factor in education towards cooperation is the teacher’s attitude. If she favours a cooperative style of teaching generally and does not shy away from the greater workload connected with group work or projects, then the conditions for learning to cooperate are good. The atmosphere within a class or group can largely be determined by the teacher, who — quite often without being aware of it — sets the tone by choosing certain types of exercises and topics.

Although the psychological considerations outlined above have influenced the selection of the 123 activities they have never been the only decisive factor. Mostly it has been my intention to collect activities which are effective learning situations for a foreign language. Quite a number of exercises have been rejected because the resultant language practice in no way justified the amount of time and preparation involved, even though they might have been excellent human relations or warming-up exercises. Since communicative aims are central to these activities they should not be used merely as fillers or frills on the odd Friday afternoon, but should have their place in revision or transfer lessons. Many types of language functions and structures can be practised in a new
way. To my mind, however, it is far more important that the activities train the students to use their knowledge of the foreign language flexibly. They have to get their meaning across in order to do the exercise and will need to utilise every scrap of skill and knowledge they possess. Fostering this flexibility in the foreign language seems to me just as vital as trying to prepare for all communicative situations that may arise.

1.3 How to use the activities

This section deals with the importance of the atmosphere within the class or group, the teacher’s role, and ways of organising discussions, as well as giving hints on the selection and use of the activities in class.

Atmosphere

Many of the activities in this book are focused on the individual learner. Students are asked to tell the others about their feelings, likes or dislikes. They are also asked to judge their own feelings and let themselves be interviewed by others. Speaking about oneself is not something that everyone does with ease. It becomes impossible, even for the most extrovert person, if the atmosphere in the group is hostile and the learner concerned is afraid of being ridiculed or mocked. The first essential requirement for the use of learner-centred activities (they are marked pers. in all the tables) is a relaxed and friendly atmosphere in the group. Only then can the aims of these activities be achieved: cooperation and the growth of understanding.

Groups or classes that have just been formed or are being taught by a new teacher may not develop this pleasant kind of group feeling immediately. In that case activities dealing with very personal topics should be avoided. The teacher may stimulate a good atmosphere by introducing both warming-up exercises (see 2.1) and jigsaw tasks (see 2.4). Even in a class where the students know each other well, certain activities may take on threatening features for individual students. In order to avoid any kind of embarrassment or ill feeling, the teacher should say that anyone may refuse to answer a personal question without having to give any reason.
Introduction

or explanation. The class have to accept this refusal without
discussion or comment. Although I have tried to steer clear of
threatening activities, there may still be a few which fall into
this category for very shy students. In any case teachers
should be able to select activities which their students will feel
at ease with. As a rough guideline teachers might ask
themselves whether they would be prepared to participate
fully in the activity themselves.

The teacher's role

A lot of the activities will run themselves as soon as they get
under way. The teacher then has to decide whether to join in
the activity as an equal member (this may sometimes be
unavoidable for pair work in classes with an odd number of
students) or remain in the background to help and observe.
The first alternative has a number of advantages: for example
the psychological distance between teacher and students may
be reduced when students get to know their teacher better. Of
course, the teacher has to refrain from continually correcting
the students or using her greater skill in the foreign language
to her advantage. If the teacher joins in the activity, she will
then no longer be able to judge independently and give advice
and help to other groups, which is the teacher's major role if
she does not participate directly. A further advantage of
non-participation is that the teacher may unobtrusively
observe the performance of several students in the foreign
language and note common mistakes for revision at a later
stage. A few activities, mainly jigsaw tasks, require the
teacher to withdraw completely from the scene.

Whatever method is chosen, the teacher should be careful
not to correct students' errors too frequently. Being
interrupted and corrected makes the students hesitant and
insecure in their speech when they should really be practising
communication. It seems far better for the teacher to use the
activities for observation and to help only when help is
demanded by the students themselves; even then they should
be encouraged to overcome their difficulties by finding
alternative ways of expressing what they want to say. There
is a list of speech acts which may be needed for the activities
(on p. 194) and the relevant section may be duplicated and
given as handouts to help the students.
How to use the activities

Ways of organising discussion groups

A number of different ways of setting up the communicative activities in this book are explained in the description of the activities themselves. For teachers who would like to change their procedures for handling classroom discussions (e.g. in connection with topical texts) a few major types are described below:

**Buzz groups** (see Cole 1970) A problem is discussed in small groups for a few minutes before views or solutions are reported to the whole class.

**Hearing** ‘Experts’ discuss a topical question and may be interviewed by a panel of students who then have to make a decision about that question.

**Fishbowl** All the members of the class sit in a big circle. In the middle of the circle there are five chairs. Three are occupied by students whose views (preferably controversial) on the topic or question are known beforehand. These three start the discussion. They may be joined by one or two students presenting yet another view. Students from the outer circle may also replace speakers in the inner circle by tapping them on the shoulder if they feel confident that they can present the case better.

**Network** The class is divided into groups which should not have more than 10 students each. Each group receives a ball of string. Whoever is speaking on the topic chosen holds the ball of string. When the speaker has finished he gives the ball of string to the next speaker, but holds on to the string. In this way a web of string develops, showing who talked the most and who the least.

**Onion** The class is divided into two equal groups. As many chairs as there are students are arranged in a double circle, with the chairs in the outer circle facing inwards and those of the inner circle facing outwards. Thus each member of the inner circle sits facing a student in the outer circle. After a few minutes of discussion all the students in the outer circle move on one chair and now have a new partner to continue with.

**Star** Four to six small groups try and find a common view or solution. Each group elects a speaker who remains in the group but enters into discussion with the speakers of the other groups.

**Market** All the students walk about the room; each talks to several others.
Opinion vote Each student receives voting cards with values from 1 to 5 (1 = agree completely, 5 = disagree completely). After the issue (which needs to be phrased as a statement) has been discussed for a while, each student votes, and the distribution of different opinions in the group can be seen at a glance.

Forced contribution In order to make sure that all the members of the class or group give their views in the discussion, numbers are distributed which determine the order of speaking.

Selection of activities

Naturally there are several possibilities for picking the right activity, ranging from skimming through the whole book to opening it at random and taking the first one you see. Here are three suggestions:
1. Look at the table which lists all the activities in alphabetical order (p. 188) and think about which selection criterion applies to you most. If you need to revise particular elements of the language, have a look at the right-hand column (‘aims/tasks’). If you are looking for an activity grouped in a special way (i.e. pairs, groups, etc.), then you should concentrate on the column marked ‘organisation’. If you are interested in an activity which does not need any preparation, then check ‘materials’. After you have found a number of likely choices, read the detailed descriptions and then decide.
2. Choose a section that sounds interesting to you. Read the introduction to the section and pick out one or more activities from the table.
3. You may be looking for an activity which is suitable for a particular level or practises a certain grammatical structure. In that case the ‘language’ and ‘level’ indexes (p. 193) will help you.

Using the activities

Once you have found a suitable activity for your class you should do the following:
1. Prepare your materials in sufficient quantity.
2. Read through the ‘procedure’ section and if necessary note down the main steps. Think about how you are going to
introduce the activity and whether your students will need any extra help.
3 Decide which role you are going to adopt (joining, helping, observing?) and stick to it throughout the activity.
4 Let the students give you feedback on the activity when it is finished.
5 Make a note of any problems arising as well as your own comments and those of your students. You can then modify the activity when you use it again.