Planning, assessment and further reading

Companion to the E.P.I. Handbook

PART 5 — FROM COMMUNICATION BACKWARDS

Planning a unit

Start with the end and build the spine. Map the unit across the eight phases and use that sequence as your blank canvas.

The build order

1. **Start with the end**
   Decide the unit's communicative goal and what excellent work looks like — a model text plus success criteria. Be laser-specific.

2. **Make the sentence builder**
   Choose high-frequency, relevant chunks. This grid is the unit's spine.

3. **Modelling & awareness-raising**
   Flood students with examples of the builder in use; pop up the grammar features to notice.

4. **Receptive processing**
   LAM & RAM tasks — input-flood until receptive knowledge is solid. Don't rush to output.

5. **Structured production**
   Pushed-output tasks (listening/speaking, then reading/writing) that force every item out, weaning off the builder.

6. **Expansion & autonomy**
   Unpack the grammar; check students can retrieve without the sentence builder.

7 **Routinisation & spontaneity**
Build speed; finish with a task that forces real-life use of the unit's language.

Across the year: recycle & interleave old and new language constantly (EARS never really stops) · run a buffer lesson every ~5 weeks to remix what isn't sticking · keep quick wins little and often (do-nows, exit tickets, cumulative tests).

Authoring the sentence builder

- **One function per builder** — built around a single communicative goal.
- **Keep it small** — ~30–40 words total; start beginners on about 12 chunks.
- **Short sentences** — no more than 9–10 words (fewer for absolute beginners).
- **≤3 chunks per cell** — don't overload any column.
- **Gloss literally** — put the "dodgy" literal English in brackets so meaning is transparent.
- **Enhance the input** — use colour and font to make the target pattern jump out.
- **Model agreement implicitly** — split masc/fem rows so grammar is shown by use, not taught yet.

Two unit blueprints

UNIT	SUB-UNITS → FINAL TASK
Describing people	hair & eyes → personality → clothes → jobs → fluency. **Final:** "auction your classmates" — describe people on the spot (unplanned).
Let's organise a party	five sub-units in the future tense (who / what / where / when / food…). **Final:** a video advert + an impromptu conversation.

Assessing the E.P.I. way

Governing principle (Transfer-Appropriate Processing): assessment must **mirror training**. If you train spontaneity, assess spontaneity; if students only ever did controlled tasks, a spontaneous exam is unfair. Test the way you taught.

Little & often

Prefer low-stakes, repeated-measure tasks over one big high-stakes test.

Don't grade fluency work

Track speed/accuracy over a term (e.g. timed reading/writing) rather than grading every attempt; use can-do self-assessment.

Task-based end points

Define each task (one/two-way, open/closed, planned/unplanned, familiar/unfamiliar) and run priming → routinisation → spontaneity.

Note: pair these task designs with your own syllabus and school marking schemes.

Your unit-build checklist

Tick as you go — your progress is saved in this browser.

- [ ] Decided the unit's communicative goal + what excellent looks like
  Step 1 — start with the end
- [ ] Built the sentence builder (one function, ~12–40 chunks, literal glosses)
  Step 2 — the spine
- [ ] Planned modelling & awareness-raising (flood + pop-up grammar)
  Phase 1–2

Planned receptive processing — LAM & RAM input-flooding

Phase 3

Planned structured production — pushed output, weaning off the SB

Phase 4

Planned expansion & autonomy — unpack grammar, retrieve without the SB

Phase 5–6

Planned routinisation & a spontaneous end task

Phase 7–8

Made assessment mirror training (task-based, little & often)

Transfer-appropriate processing

Built in recycling & interleaving across the term

Across the year

GOING DEEPER

Further viewing & reading

Curated from the community EPI Padlet. The live board (videos play there) is the best single starting point.

▶ Watch first

Gianfranco Conti — "Philosophy in 45 minutes"

YouTube · the canonical intro to EPI

Steve Smith — "About Sentence Builders" (CPD 25)

YouTube · what they are & why they cut load

Christian Moretti-Byrnes — "How Sentence Builders support learners"

YouTube · one SB across a whole unit

📖 Read

"The 8 tenets of E.P.I." (2018)

gianfrancoconti.com · the definitive summary

"Ten reasons why you SHOULDN'T adopt E.P.I." (2022)

debunks objections — good for skeptics

"The real MARS-EARS: how a sequence truly unfolds" (2022)
practice vs the idealised diagram

“11 Cutting-Edge Research Findings Every Teacher of Mandarin Should Know” (2026)
NEW Aug 2026 · Mandarin-specific: tones, characters, retrieval · summarised as Companion 4

“The Ten Principles of Effective Speaking Instruction” (2026)
Jun 2026 · speaking principles that map onto the EARS phases

Conti keynotes CLTANSW — September 2026
the Mandarin article above is his prep for the talk

Dylan Viñales — "Teaching languages using EPI"
mrvinalesmfl.wordpress.com

Silvia Bastow — "Using sentence builders"
fraubastowmfl.blogspot.com

MFLCraft — "Curriculum design at KS3: less is more"
mflcraft.blogspot.com

🛠 Tools

sentencebuilders.com	SB → auto gap-fills, dictation, translation
language-gym.com	Conti's own platform
textivate.com	text-reconstruction from any text
teachvid.com	video listening / reading tasks

PART 8 — GO FURTHER

Books & official platforms

Everything on this page condenses Dr Conti’s own work. These are the official places to buy the books, use his platforms and read him first-hand.

The books

BOOK **The Language Teacher Toolkit (2nd ed.)** Conti & Smith — the full methodology.

BOOK **Breaking the Sound Barrier** Teaching learners how to listen.

BOOK **Memory: What Every Language Teacher Should Know** Plus the Sentence Builders book series — author page.

Official platforms

BLOG **The Language Gym (blog)** The method in Conti's own words, free.

SITE **language-gym.com** His interactive practice platform.

SITE **sentencebuilders.com** Ready-made sentence builders + self-marking games.

LINK **The EPI Padlet** Community board: videos, blogs, sample activities.

E.P.I. and the MARS-EARS cycle are the work of Dr Gianfranco Conti — The Language Gym (gianfrancoconti.com). Unofficial, independent guide; not affiliated with or endorsed by Dr Conti. Examples and activity write-ups are original.