Input Processing Speed Dating
Principle 1: Learners process input for meaning before they process it for form.

Round one

Principle P1a   Learners process content words in the input before anything else.
When meaning and form are in competition for storage in working memory, it will be form that is always second choice, and many times there will not be any "room" left.

This sub-principle, called the Primacy of Content Words Principle, basically answers the following question: *where* do learners look for meaning first? The answer is content words. From their L1 experience, L2 learners are certainly aware that not all words in an utterance are of the same nature. They know that some words will help gather the essential meaning conveyed, while other words are simply "fillers." While it is true that sometimes these filler words are processed together with other sentential elements as unanalyzed chunks, for the most part L2 learners naturally (*not* by conscious choice) filter out words that simply serve as grammatical markers and focus on content words during comprehension. L2 learners may take advantage of their L1 experience from an acoustic perspective as well. In general, they realize that content words are more acoustically salient than are other sentential elements, and this results in learners looking for acoustic hints as to where to find the essential meaning in an oral utterance.

Redundancy: When two or more elements in an utterance or discourse encode the same semantic information.

Round two

Principle P1b: Learners will tend to rely on lexical items as opposed to grammatical form to get meaning when both encode the same semantic information.
Principle P1c: Learners are more likely to process non-redundant meaningful grammatical form before they process redundant meaningful forms;
Principle P1d: Learners are more likely to process meaningful grammatical forms before non-meaningful form irrespective of redundancy.
This principle is called the Lexical Preference Principle and it involves a competition for learners' resources when there are redundant features in an input string. In many cases, two or more elements in an utterance or a discourse will communicate the same thing. For example in the utterance *Yesterday Leslie played tennis at the gym*, both the lexical item *yesterday* and the *–ed* verb ending communicate past tense. This principle states that, in this instance, learners will naturally tend to rely on *yesterday* over the verb inflection in order to gather semantic information (when the action is occurring). The obvious disadvantage to this learner strategy is that it will hinder learners from processing the past tense marker since they do not need to process it to comprehend the utterance. Indeed, they may even perceive the presence of the marker (visually or aurally) yet still not process it due to the limits on their working memory. Learners process on a need basis—do they need to process a given form to arrive at the meaning of a message? Regardless of whether or not one or both forms are redundant, the form carrying semantic information will more likely be processed before the form that does not convey meaning.

Round three

Principle P1f: Learners tend to process items in sentence initial position before those in final position and those in medial position. The Sentence Location Principle lays out a specific hierarchy with regard to the likelihood that L2 features will be processed.

I use the utterance *John hates movies* to illustrate each utterance position with an example:

Most difficult	**Utterance –medial items**	*hate-s*
Difficult	**Utterance – final items**	*movie-s*
Least Difficult	**Utterance – initial items**	*John*

In this simple utterance, P1f would predict that processing the meaning and function of *John* as subject would be the least difficult. The third person *–s* on the verb would be more difficult to process than the *–s* plural marker on movies. There are other factors in play (amount of input, length of utterance, etc), but for the sake of this discussion, we can see that L2 processors are sensitive to position within an utterance. The easiest forms to process are those located in initial position, the second easiest forms to process are final, and the most difficult forms to process are those that occur in the medial position. VanPatten's model of input processing along with the principles we have been discussing form the basis for **Structured Input,** whose activities purposely take into account the processing strategies of the learner. These activities are a deliberate attempt to push leaners to notice and subsequently process target forms that might otherwise go unnoticed.

Round four

VanPatten proposes 6 guidelines for design of structured input activities:

1. **Present one thing at a time.** This guideline refers to the number of forms an instructor presents to learners in one activity. With only one new form to attend to, learners will be more likely to actually map meaning onto that form. A secondary benefit of the one-at-a-time approach is that the explicit information given to students is kept o a minimum.
2. **Keep meaning in focus.** To determine whether meaning is kept in focus during an activity, ask this question: Can learners complete the activity without understanding what they hear or read?
3. **Move from sentences to connected discourse.** During initial stage of exposure to a form, learners will struggle even more if utterances are not kept short. Lengthier utterances tend to exhaust learners' working memory with nothing left over to process a new form.   As a general guideline, it is best to move from shorter utterances to more lengthy utterances then to connected discourse before moving on to output based activities.
4. **Use both oral and written input.** Some learner have difficulty learning new forms without having the opportunity to read them. Hearing forms allows for only sound-meaning connections, whereas written form-meaning connections are made within text.
5. **Have learners do something with the input.** Learners need to be pushed to make decisions based on meaning and form instead of being mere recipients of input.
6. **Keep the learner's processing strategies in mind.** This is perhaps the most important guideline. Activities that merely provide meaning-bearing input and have learners make decisions still do not do enough. It is important to take into account what is happening in the learner's head during input. Use the principles above and feel free to manipulate the input to make the target form more salient and therefore more likely to be processed.