

# Games

Despite differing views on their role, games as teaching and learning tools tend to figure in most language classrooms. Some teachers, and students, see them as interesting diversions from the “real” work, while others integrate them into the overall learning environment, using them to promote autonomous problem solving, discovery learning, and team work. In this context, it is good to remember that before they start school, children take *play* very seriously and do most of their learning through the medium of games. Howard Gardner (1991) has some telling comments on this topic in *The Unschooled Mind*, a book which is well worth reading.

Games can be used for a variety of purposes. They can be grammar-oriented, they can focus on fluency, and they can facilitate cognitive, affective, or social goals. However, when designing games for our own situations, taking into account variables such as age, proficiency, motivation, and confidence, the underlying philosophy of teaching and learning will once more determine the form and content. This aspect of materials design is crucial, which is why it gets so much attention here, in that materials have a tendency to become teacher-led and teacher-centred if the designer is not careful. Games are a case in point.

Explaining the rules or the method of playing a game

## Games can serve a variety of language learning purposes.

can be extremely difficult, requiring the teacher to spend an undue amount of time explaining, often in Korean. Even then, there will be students who still do not “get it” and the game-activity can become a burden.

There are a number of strategies we can use to prevent this. On the one hand, if we wish to use the game format to introduce, use, or review commands and directions (linguistic goals), then we can make sure that the instructions are at the level of the students:

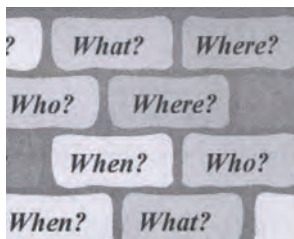


Fig. 1. Portion of *wh*-word game board.

Short and simple at the basic level, one concept per sentence; appropriate structure and grammar at the intermediate level; and complex sentences at the advanced level.

On the other hand, if our goals include teamwork,

creativity, problem solving, etc., then the game format can actually make use of the students' inherent game-playing talents. For example, in the game I have designed, *wh*-questions are arranged on a game board; simple rectangle tiles with the *wh*-words inside each tile are randomly arranged on an A4 or A3 piece of paper (Figure 1). The teacher asks the players to design a game using the game board and the *wh*-words on it.

## Materials Design

By Andrew Finch

Rather than trying to understand confusing game rules, students now talk together, deciding the form and content of their game. Not only are the *wh*-questions practised in this case, but students also engage in meaningful discussion, including agreement, disagreement, suggestion, brainstorming, and use of conditionals.

The above example also illustrates how this student-centred approach to games can operate in a multi-level classroom. For the students who need to spend a long time on the grammar and the decision-making, a game board can be stimulus enough. For those who get through the whole process, however, numbers 1 to 5 can be provided under *wh*-word tiles on the board, prefaced by the phrase “Rules for the game.” In the spirit of integrated, multi-level teaching, students now have the opportunity of putting the rules of their games into written form. This might seem a challenging task, but those who *finish* earlier than the others benefit from this sort of mental stretching; we need to challenge the “quicker” students as well as the “not-so-quick.” Finally, they can explain their game to other students or even make a presentation about it. How about making and laminating a final version of the game, to be used by future students, or even making a video? Here is a video made by middle school students (Video 6: “Let’s Play the ‘Can you?’ Game!” at <http://www.finchpark.com/videos/teaching-videos/teaching/index.html>).

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# Surveys

Surveys offer opportunities for interaction, communication, group work, and attention to accuracy. They are meaningful and authentic and can be effective language learning tools. Our survey materials need to satisfy certain criteria: (1) The survey takes up ONE sheet. (2) It looks good (attractive presentation). (3) Instructions are clear, in the target language (English) and succinct (KISS - Keep It Short and Simple). (4) All the words on the sheet are 100% accurate (grammar). (5) Input language (grammar, phrases, idioms) is clear and relevant. (6) Students have the space to write responses, make notes, and collect data. (7) Survey questions are meaningful to the students, logically organized, and conveniently categorized. (8) Graphics are used sparingly and for maximum effect. They enhance the meaning of the text.

A good rule when writing instructions is to make a first draft and then cross out half the words. It is surprising how concise we can be when we really examine the words. Look at language level, vocabulary, inappropriate phrases, and textual padding: “Do I really need to say that?” “Do the students really need that?”

Aim to get the activity going as quickly as possible, with little explanation from the teacher. If your instructions

are clear and at the students’ proficiency level, they will start by themselves. Think of instructions as comprehension tests. Those who can’t understand, can ask for help from the teacher or from other groups. They can also watch other groups and figure out what to do.

In the first example on this page, students perform a survey using “Do you ever...?” The grammar (routines, present simple tense) occurs in every question and the activity is basically a substitution drill. However, the repetition is meaningful and is personalized to the students. There are also opportunities (at the bottom) for students to make their own questions.

## Materials Design

By Andrew Finch

*Surveys allow for meaningful interaction and, at the same time, attend to accuracy.*

Do you ever ...?

**Partners or Groups:**  
 1) Ask your partner these questions.  
 2) Ask someone else in the group.

**When someone says Yes, I do, write his/her name.**  
**When someone says No, I don't, don't write anything.**

Question	Name	How Often?
1. Do you ever ride a bicycle?		
2. Do you ever ride a bus?		
3. Do you ever play volleyball?		
4. Do you ever play the violin?		
5. Do you ever cook a meal?		
6. Do you ever wash your clothes?		
7. Do you ever play table tennis?		
8. Do you ever eat French food?		
9. Do you ever watch TV?		
10. Do you ever use a computer?		
11. Do you ever use a hand phone?		
12. Do you ever listen to pop music?		
13. Do you ever read a magazine?		
14. Do you ever travel by car?		
15. Do you ever go abroad?		
16. Do you ever travel by plane?		
17. Do you ever travel by car?		
18. Do you ever ...		
19. Do you ever ...		
20. Do you ever ...		

From A. E. Finch (2007), p. 68.

“Do you ever...?” is a one-way task (Q-A) which lays the groundwork for more dynamic interview activities later on. Error correction can take place at this (static) stage since the focus is on accuracy. The instructions “don’t write anything” can be confusing to students, but they are also an opportunity for accurate reading! The final column, “How often?” encourages a further one-way exchange and also reviews adverbs of frequency in the context of “Do you ever...?”

### Reference

Finch, A. E. (2007). *Time to Speak*. Unpublished revision of *Tell Me More!*

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# Practicing Vocabulary: Bingo

**B**ingo is in essence a simple game of chance that requires the participants to listen-and-find simple information and to mark it on their card, without transformation of the information or use of cognition (problem-solving skills, critical thinking, etc.). It has entered the western cultural consciousness as a competitive game, usually played for money or prizes. However, Bingo has the potential to make second/foreign language vocabulary learning interesting, challenging, student-centered, and collaborative.

The “Bingo” concept can be adapted to meet the needs of any group of language learners, and can be used for various teaching/learning purposes, according to the language content and the characteristics of the learners (age, proficiency, affective variables, etc.). The following sections explore Bingo and its application in English language teaching.

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*Bingo can be adapted to meet the needs of any group of language learners.*

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## **Types of Bingo**

There are four classifications (Traditional Bingo games; Task Bingo games; Talking Bingo games; and Testing Bingo games). These can be reclassified from the perspective of the participant: (1) *Listening Bingo games* (passive, static, one-way, instructional, individual, receptive, and information-gap activities), (2) *Speaking Bingo games* (active, dynamic, two-way, communicative, group, cognitive, language-performance, and information-transfer activities), (3) *Self-Made Bingo games* (active, dynamic, two-way, interactive, group, cognitive, collaborative, language-performance, problem-solving, and critical thinking).

Bingo games can also be classified by the type of activity: (1) *Picture Bingo* (picture to picture, picture to word), (2) *Word Bingo* (word to picture, word to word), (3) *Synonym Bingo* (similar word), (4) *Antonym Bingo* (opposite word), (5) *Translation Bingo* (Eng-Kor, Kor-Eng), (6) *Matching Bingo* (matching a sportsperson to a sport, a singer to a song, etc.), (7) *20 Questions Bingo* (asking questions about the words), (8) *Riddle Bingo* (definitions); 9) *Pyramid Bingo* (using a different format for the Bingo card), and (10) *Idiom Bingo* (explanations). These types and classifications of Bingo activities can be mixed in many ways, focusing on: vocabulary, grammar, notion/function, and task-based learning. As well, the Bingo grid used in language classrooms can be varied

to suit the level of the learners, such as a Bingo grid of 3 × 3 squares for pre-school children, etc.

It is a good idea to give flexibility in calling out “Bingo.” When a player marks or fills in all the squares in a row - diagonally, horizontally, or vertically - they can call out “One Bingo.” When another player marks or fills in all the squares in two rows diagonally, horizontally, or vertically, they can call out “Two Bingos” and so on, to the point where a player calls out “Full Bingo” when they are successful in filling in all the squares in the grid on the Bingo card.

## *Materials Design*


*By Andrew Finch*

Students are typically excellent at making their own rules for language games. It can be extremely effective, therefore, to let them devise the rules for each activity, rather than trying to get them to do exactly what the teacher tells them to do. Game-based instructions can be very difficult for learners to comprehend, and can impede successful language transactions, which are the goal of the activity. In contrast, simple instructions which point out the main features of the game, but which encourage the learners to make their own rules, can be great learning tools. Such instructions will lead to meta-discussion about the game, and will help students to become more involved. If this discussion can take place in English, then students will be actively practicing linguistic functions such as suggestion, agreement, and making decisions. If the students are unable to discuss in English, then they will still be participating cognitively and their brainstorming will be about the task which they will be performing in English. In other words, they will be “on task.”

Have an exciting, challenging, and fruitful time in your collaborative exploration of the world of Bingo activities for language learning! An informative PowerPoint presentation on Bingo materials design can be downloaded from this URL: [www.finchpark.com/ppp/Interactive\\_Bingo.ppt](http://www.finchpark.com/ppp/Interactive_Bingo.ppt)

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# Online Grammar: Hot Potatoes

As mentioned in the previous column (Volume 14, Issue 1), online grammar sites tend to leave the organization and classification of grammar activities to the teacher, so that we often have to spend a lot of time looking for the activities we need. In addition, Internet URLs tend to change, and online learning sites come and go, while sites that start off being free, suddenly require a subscription!

An alternative to these frustrating scenarios is to make our own online activities, using the free software, *Hot Potatoes* (<http://hotpot.uvic.ca/>). This offers a wonderful way of creating our own vocabulary, grammar, and review tests, as well as other activities, and then putting them online. The software is simple to use, and the finished files are quite small, taking up minimal space on your server or your online cafe. You can also upload them to the *Hot Potatoes* server.

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*All too often, computer activities simply substitute the screen for the textbook page. Yet Hot Potatoes offers more.*

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*Hot Potatoes* was developed by the Humanities Computing and Media Centre (HCMC) of the University of Victoria in Canada, and version 6.3 can now be downloaded from the *Hot Potatoes* site, where we can also find useful tutorials and a clipart library of 3000 images (bottom of the page) that can be used in *Hot Potatoes*. The tutorials are easy to follow and very comprehensive, and there are lots of sample sites that show you the range of possibilities, including the use of pictures, music, and videos as input.

In terms of the rapidity of change to which we are accustomed in ELT, Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) has been around for some time now, and has largely moved into Multimedia-Assisted Language Learning (MALL). However, it is important to remember that neither CALL nor MALL is a philosopher's stone, capable of changing base metal into gold. They simply offer a different platform, or a different media location, for language learning. They are not magical motivators and can be just as boring as any badly designed grammar activity. Getting a student to sit in front of a computer screen and perform

grammar activities does not mean that those activities will be intrinsically effective in terms of language learning. All too often, they simply substitute the screen for the textbook page.

The same criteria apply as for any other learning materials, and we still have to consider the goals, input, activity type, teacher role, student role, and setting, before starting to make

## Materials Design

By Andrew Finch


the activity. Having said this, *Hot Potatoes* offers some very useful formats for our creativity: matching (JMatch), cloze (JCloze), multiple-choice (JQuiz), crosswords (JCross), and scrambled sentences (JMix). Finally, "The Masher" allows you to build a suite of different activities that lead on from one to the next.

The makers stress that *Hot Potatoes* was not designed as a testing tool, but if you have a cgi function on your server, you can get students to submit their results to you. This function appears along with lots of other useful "tweaks" in the Configure Output section of the Options bar in the top menu. Examples of the different formats and of student-designed activities can be viewed at [www.finchpark.com/courses/hotpot/](http://www.finchpark.com/courses/hotpot/).

It is really good to find software that is good, easy to use, and free. Once we have downloaded it, mastered the tutorials, and started making activities, we are empowered as online materials designers, and freed of the restrictions of having to photocopy loads of sheets for our students. The activities, which we have made specifically for them, remain on the Internet, waiting to be used again and again. Furthermore, they can be set as homework assignments, freeing up time for performance skills in the classroom.

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## Online Grammar

We usually make our own materials in order to supplement course textbooks. Whatever the merits of these required texts, the fact is that every student is unique in terms of learning styles, learning preferences, learning background, beliefs, perceptions and attitudes about learning, character, motivation, confidence, etc. The list of student-specific needs can go on forever. Many authors and researchers have thus pointed out the illogicality of the traditional paradigm in which the teacher *knows* what every student needs to learn and attempts to *teach* it to everyone. Not only do students not always learn what the teacher teaches, but a basic needs *analysis* will show that the proficiency range in the classroom makes discrete grammar teaching meaningful for only a minority of the students.

Nevertheless, we often find ourselves tied to a textbook and to its grammatical content. How are we to adapt the textbook to the individual needs of the students and to the group-specific needs of each class? This is the question that materials design attempts to answer. If teachers have the ability to analyze the textbook and to identify its learning goals, then they can produce multi-level learning materials that are suitable for their own students.

In terms of grammar, a needs analysis will quickly show a range of acquisition and comprehension in each class, depending on various factors. However, the increasing wealth of grammar activities on the Internet offers an interesting approach to this problem. Once the teacher has found *reliable, well-classified* grammar

activities online, these can be assigned to the students as appropriate.

*Reliable* and *well-classified*, there is the rub (as Hamlet would have said if he had been a 21st century language teacher). All too often, we visit an Internet grammar site only to find a seemingly random collection of ungraded activities. At this point, it is up to the teacher to spend a great deal of time going through them and finding the ones that they want to use. For this situation, here are a few suggestions. (The extended list can be found in Finch & Shin, 2005, p. 429.)

A Google search for “grammar exercises” etc. will turn up lots of sites to explore. However, these all take time to investigate and to match up with the relevant pages in the textbook. It can be a good idea to find a couple of really good sites and to stay with them. Individual exercises can then be completed online and the final page (saying “Well Done: 100%”) can be printed out and put into the students’ portfolios. Teachers who fear cheating can make use of JavaScript grammar activities available online. These produce different questions for every user and cannot be duplicated.

The sites mentioned above have all been recommendable so far, but Internet URLs tend to change and sites come and go, often leaving the hard-worked language teacher in a last-minute bind. There is another alternative, of course, which is to make one’s own online grammar activities, using the free software, Hot Potatoes (<http://hotpot.uvic.ca/>). This is quite simple to use and has the advantage that the teacher can tailor the activities/exercises/quizzes to their own students. Once the activities are designed, made, and uploaded, they are there for as long as needed and can be fine-tuned and added to at any time. More about this in the next issue!

### Reference

Finch, A. E., & Shin, D. (2005). *Integrating teaching and assessment in the EFL classroom*. Seoul: Sahoipungron.

## Materials Design

By Andrew Finch

### Grammar Exercises

- <http://web2.uvcs.uvic.ca/elc/studyzone/330/grammar/index.htm>  
Excellent. 330 grammar topics by University of Victoria, Canada.
- [http://iteslj.org/links/ESL/Grammar\\_and\\_English\\_Usage/](http://iteslj.org/links/ESL/Grammar_and_English_Usage/)  
Grammar sites suggested by ITESL-J. A lot of sites to wade through here!
- <http://www.eslgold.com/grammar.html>  
A comprehensive site.
- <http://www.english-4u.de/>  
English 4 U: Well structured.

### Grammar Quizzes

- <http://www.manythings.org/>  
Excellent. Many activities for students.
- <http://a4esl.org/q/h/grammar.html>  
Very good. Self-study quizzes.
- <http://a4esl.org/>  
Very good. JavaScript activities for ESL students.
- <http://www.ego4u.com/en/cram-up/grammar>  
English Grammar Online 4 U

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# Input for Learning

In his book, *Designing Tasks for the Communicative Classroom*, David Nunan (1989) mentions “input” as one of the six components of a task. The other five are: goals, activities, teacher role, learner role, and settings (p. 11). When making choices in each of these categories, the teaching philosophy of the materials designer quickly becomes evident. If the teacher role is seen as (benevolent) autocrat and the source of his/her students’ linguistic knowledge, for example, the activities he/she designs will focus on replication and memorization of his/her knowledge. It will not be possible for the students to develop beyond the teacher’s own proficiency. On the other hand, if the teacher role is seen as (non-threatening) facilitator of student-directed collaborative learning, then the six task components will offer appropriate learning opportunities (affordances), along with open-ended follow-up possibilities for independent learning. In this situation, learning strategies will be promoted, and students will learn how to access language not possessed by the teacher (e.g., technical and specific medical, legal, architectural, or engineering language).

Similar considerations apply for input. Nunan (1989) tells us that “input refers to the data that form the departure point for the task.” Thus, he gives “a wide range of sources” from which “communicate tasks can be derived” (p. 53). These sources, which include genres such as letters, newspaper extracts, memos,

managed when making EIL activities. For example, when making a controlled-language activity to repair monitored errors in students’ language performance (e.g., [www.finchpark.com/books/tmms/o2/images/34.gif](http://www.finchpark.com/books/tmms/o2/images/34.gif)), the language is the input, and the genre will be appropriate for the language that is being repaired.

This does not mean that other factors can be ignored, even in a simple recycling activity. We still need to consider cognitive input (challenging thinking and reasoning abilities), affective input (emotion management), social input (group responsibility), psychological input (self-esteem, etc.), and cultural input (appreciation of diversity and ethnicity), if we are to make language learning meaningful and relevant. Thus, an “advice” activity might give problems and critical-thinking activities about the pragmatics of courtesy in various cultures, including the “home” culture. A “complaint” activity, on the other hand, might focus on letter-writing linguistic input, including formal language and sophisticated expressions of polite dissatisfaction in different cultures and situations.

## Materials Design

By Andrew Finch

**Stereotypes: Evaluating People on Incomplete Information (1)**

**Groups of four people:**

- Two people (1, 2): Look at the questionnaire on this page.
- Two people (3, 4): Look at the questionnaire on page 83.

**Two people (1, 2):** Below are descriptions of five people.

- Talk together about the information given. Circle the numbers which best indicate what sort of person each one is. Make a total score for each person.
- Discuss the results with the other pair (3, 4).
- Talk about stereotypes and the effect that stereotyping has on people.
- Discuss what relevance this activity has for English teachers.

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Hee-su is 21 years old and a senior in college. She is 160 cm tall and meets her boyfriend about twice a week. She likes wearing fancy clothes and perfume. She is probably:

Intelligent	5	4	3	2	1	Stupid
Easygoing	5	4	3	2	1	Hot-tempered
Liberal	5	4	3	2	1	Conservative
Attractive	5	4	3	2	1	Unattractive
<b>Total =</b>						

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Frank is 32, black, married to a high school graduate, and works for IBM Korea. He is probably:

Friendly	5	4	3	2	1	Unfriendly
Intelligent	5	4	3	2	1	Stupid
Good public speaker	5	4	3	2	1	Poor public speaker
Steady	5	4	3	2	1	Temperamental
Ambitious	5	4	3	2	1	Lazy
<b>Total =</b>						

Figure 1. Stereotypes

photographs, street maps, extracts from a play, etc., are mostly authentic sources which are used to initiate language use in the target language. The author is being “communicative” in this definition, since none of his six components describe linguistic or other factors. However, such input has to be identified and carefully

Figure 1 shows part of page 65 of *English Reflections*. This activity, in addition to the linguistic input (instructions plus character adjectives (intelligent-stupid, etc.)), invites students to think about their own perceptions and stereotyping when using these terms (psychological-cultural-affective-social input).

### References

**Finch, A. E.** (2000). *English reflections*. Daegu, South Korea: Kyungpook National University Press.

**Finch, A. E.** (2006). *The way ahead, China*. Beijing, China: Electric Press.

**Nunan, D.** (1989). *Designing tasks for the communicative classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

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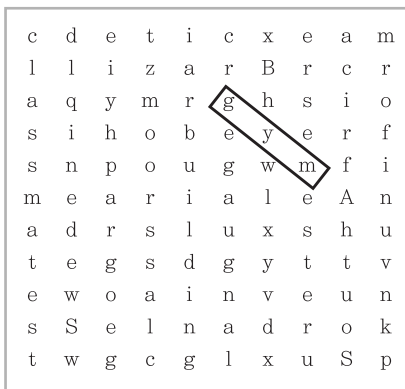


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# Crosswords and Word Searches

Crosswords and word searches offer a great way of introducing, maintaining, or reviewing vocabulary, but, as with all materials, the process is just as important as the result.

Even with a simple activity such as the one below, we need to think about what is going on, and why. We are perhaps introducing vocabulary, or reinforcing words encountered in a textbook, and there is some consistency in the vocabulary, so we might be able to think of a schema.



However, the question is, “Why have we chosen this format?” As it stands, it is a simple search-and-find activity, which might well achieve some goals, but these will be very limited.

Cognition and critical-thinking skills will not be over-taxed by this endeavor and excitement is not really on the cards! How about inviting the students to make the word search on a site such as [www.armoredpenguin.com/wordsearch/](http://www.armoredpenguin.com/wordsearch/) or [www.superkids.com/aweb/tools/words/search/](http://www.superkids.com/aweb/tools/words/search/)? This sort of approach transforms the learning experience immediately, from passive to active, from memory to discovery, and from completing to creating. Students (perhaps in pairs or groups) now need to understand the instructions on the web page, choose the words, create the word search, print it out, and submit it to the teacher in some form or another. Not only are process and product combined, but the original goal (learning vocabulary) will be realized along with an enhanced sense of achievement on the part of the students.

With crosswords, we are once more introducing or reviewing vocabulary, though this time, we are supplying certain letters and offering clues. No doubt this will be sufficient, especially if the crossword is based on a text in a textbook. This could be a pair activity, with students performing the normal crossword problem of looking for words to fit given parameters. But is there any way of making this more interactive, more challenging, more motivational, more discovery-oriented, and more student-centered?

One approach is to give half the words to each student

(pairwork) and to ask them to explain the words to their partners. This not only promotes explanation (an important aspect of comprehension), description, checking gambits, and classroom language, but also ensures that both students actually understand the vocabulary in question. If you can explain the meaning of a word to your peer, then you have a good grasp of the associations that go with it.

Another approach is to give students the answers and to ask them to write the clues. We now have them discussing, searching for definitions, summarizing, and writing. If they give the blank crossword with their clues to another group of students to fill in, then they can find out whether they have done a good job, through peer-feedback.

Finally, just as with the word search, we can ask students to choose appropriate words and make online crosswords at sites such as [http://edhelper.com/crossword\\_free.htm](http://edhelper.com/crossword_free.htm) and <http://www.crosswordpuzzlegames.com/create.html>. Once more, the activity is promoting higher-order thinking by taking the materials design to the students, who have to make the decisions, choose the vocabulary, make the crossword, print it out, and submit it for assessment.

There are many good puzzle sites on the Internet. Particularly useful for crosswords and word searches are Schoolhouse technologies: <http://www.schoolhousetech.com/>, Crossword Construction Kit: <http://www.crosswordkit.com/>, and Wordsearch Construction Kit: <http://www.wordsearchkit.com/>. Explore what is out there, and engage your students in the learning process.

Examples of word searches and crosswords in this article come from Finch, A. E., (2008). *My First English Discussion*. Seoul: Pearson Longman.

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## Materials Design: Graphics, Part 2

As language teachers in the high tech, online world of Korea, we share with our students an increasingly visual world. Every day, we are bombarded by graphics, videos, and other images, in various forms and contexts, from shop signs and billboard ads to TV commercials, Music TV, animations, smileys, and online videos. Marshall McLuhan was not joking when he said, "The medium is the message," so long ago (1964). These days, messages present micro-second images that flash by with ever-increasing rapidity. But what has this got to do with materials design?

I am sure we have all noticed the tendency of textbooks to try to "catch up" with their computer-literate, thumb-texting users by using "trendy" graphics on all the pages. The argument seems to be that if students live in a world of graphics, then a textbook full of graphics must be modern and effective. Thus, it is not unusual to find graphics that not only do not enhance the learning content, but sometimes have no relation to it. Even worse, the graphics chosen might have subtexts, for example, "shop-till-you-drop" or "TGIF" are acceptable life-philosophies, and studying is for "nerds."

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*Graphics are an extremely effective tool that needs to be handled with care.*

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The point is that graphics are an extremely effective tool that (as with computers and other tools) needs to be handled with care. As mentioned in part 1 of this article, we need to keep asking ourselves the value of graphics in our supplementary materials. Pleasant images can add to the "feel-good" factor of an activity, thus enhancing the affective nature of the task. But an empty space on a page gives students room to make notes and perform the written part of an integrated task. Therefore, it is always good to take a look at the empty space first, before filling it with an image, to decide why we are taking this empty space away from them. We can use images in different ways.

This first type of image simply illustrates the text. For example, a shark is well known for having lots of very sharp teeth, so it is natural for an image of a shark to be associated with a toothbrush and toothpaste. If we have a dialog or text about teeth and going to the dentist, this image helps to rest our eyes from the script for a while, but it does little else.

The second type of image is part of the learning

content. As an example, a functional image that can be used for many purposes is the 12- or 24-hour clock. Students learn how to tell the time in English, using the image to talk about hours and minutes. A blank clock face is also a very useful image, allowing the students to experiment and help each other with time-related activities.

Another type of functional image can be used for eliciting description - clothes, parts of the face, parts of the body, etc. This leads from

"What is he wearing?" and "What does he look like?" into "What's it made of?" A graphic of this type (e.g., a discovery activity) could help to establish the schema of the reading text. Further description could be encouraged by providing another blank image, for example, of a face, and getting the students fill it in and then describe their faces to each other.

The possible uses of suitable graphics continue in various contexts: vocabulary association (bingo games, matching games, flashcards); information transfer (maps, graphs, tables, charts); photos; etc. But in all these cases, they are used with the purpose of facilitating learning, and they are part of the learning content. We might say that the activity could not proceed effectively without them. Just as when writing the text of an activity, it is good to see how many words you can cross out and still keep the flow and the meaning intact, so it is an interesting activity to see how many graphics you can 'lose' from a page without impairing comprehension, meaning, or performance. Why not give it a try?

\*TGIF: Thank God it's Friday.


\*nerd: a person who likes intellectual activities rather than social or physical ones.

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# Graphics, Part I: Friend or Foe?

Graphics liven up the page, make the textbook attractive, and motivate students to learn — in theory. However, it is good to take a look behind the scenes before flooding the page with pictures. This *Materials Design* article takes a step back and looks at the usefulness of graphics in language learning materials, before offering guidelines and examples in Part II.

Graphics are considered very important by authors and publishers of textbooks. This is not surprising at a time when many of life's messages are conveyed through visual media, from the micro-second flashing of images on popular TV shows to the growing use of videos-as-news on the Internet. Icons are everywhere, helping us to navigate and comprehend Internet pages, road signs, subway stations, and weather information. The prevalence of graphics-as-communication makes it common to see large, silent screens in public places — pure visual statements, flashing out their messages of a better life (advertising), information (traffic, flight times, etc.), entertainment (silent music videos, quiz shows) and sport (football, tennis, etc.).

Such media messages have become a part of life. But where does that place us as educators? Should we follow the trend by cramming our learning materials with graphics, or by producing learning videos that flash from image to image? Pick up a language textbook and flick through it page by page: How graphic-dense is it? What function do the graphics serve? Are they useful? Do they enhance the learning experience? Are they culturally and socially appropriate? Do they inspire you to teach the content? Would they inspire you (as a student) to study the content?

These questions might seem a little strange. After all, language textbooks teach language, don't they? The pictures are just there to make the process more enjoyable. However, when we take a look through (even) well-known textbooks, we find that graphics are often culturally and politically loaded with hidden assumptions. For example, there is the vocabulary exercise which matches seemingly innocent words such as *car*, *house*, and *ring*, with their pictures. Upon examining those pictures, however, we find an expensive sports car, a large mansion, and a thick gold ring with a large diamond. What is the message here?

Similar issues arise from the picture of young, semi-

naked white Americans, surfing in California. The implication is that the textbook will help learners to join a target community of "native-speaking" language users, and that this is the goal of studying English. But what if the learner doesn't want to join such a community? What if the learner wishes to use English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) or as an International language (EIL)? What if the learner is a Muslim (very likely in Asia) and sees such pictures as examples of western capitalism? And what if the learner would love to surf in California, but sees this as an impossible dream? All these possibilities represent a barrier to learning — one that arose before the text was read, thanks to inappropriate graphics.


Language teachers now have amazing "teachnology" (e.g., computers and word processors) which can supply clipart, photos, videos, and even movie trailers to suit every learning situation. However, we need to use these wonderful assets as learning tools. Rather than throwing "pretty pictures" on the page, simply because they look good, we should use graphics to enhance the text and make learning more effective. In this case, a short list of simple questions can be a useful toolbox from which to extract the most from our visual resources:

Do the students need/want graphics here? Would it be better to leave empty space for note-taking? Can I use graphics that will help students to comprehend the text? Can I use graphics as learning content? Can I find graphics that have no hidden agendas? Can I find graphics that are culturally appropriate?

The next article in this *Materials Design* column will look at these questions.

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## Materials Design

By Andrew Finch

# Discovery Materials

The materials we make for our students reflect our teaching philosophy, and discovery learning materials are no exception. There are a number of student-centered concepts involved, the most important being that students learn best by finding out for themselves - building on knowledge they already possess, constructing knowledge together. Another concept of importance for the teacher is that all students have unique proficiencies, learning backgrounds, language-learning experiences, and knowledge of lexis. If we try to teach the vocabulary of the textbook to the class as a whole, then we can hope to get it right for about 10% of the students: Those who do not have the vocabulary will find it too difficult, and those who already know it will be bored.

However, if we see vocabulary as something that can be discovered when needed, it immediately takes on a different character. It becomes a way of exploring the target language, sharing information, and finding new information in a collaborative setting.

One approach to discovery learning is to supply a picture related to the target language (e.g., parts of the face and hands; see Figure 1). The input vocabulary is supplied at the bottom of the page, and the word boxes around the page are empty. Students need to find out which words match which parts, and write them in the boxes. This is a “guided” activity, where the target vocabulary is supplied.

Students are now presented with a task - to identify vocabulary items in the target language. Because of their various language learning experiences, and because of TV, movies, and loanwords from English, many words will already be familiar to them, and they can fill them in at once. This will give them the sort of success that is important when learning a language. If working in groups, they can then share their information with each other, increasing their success, and reaping the benefits of “*i + 1*” learning. Finally, if there are still words which the students do not know, they can perform some basic information-access activities, by looking in a dictionary (electronic or paper), searching the Internet, or even asking the teacher.

At the end of this activity, every student has filled in the boxes. Meanwhile, the teacher has been monitoring progress, giving help where needed, and identifying vocabulary items which the students did not know (e.g., *knuckle*). The teacher can now concentrate on those items, or move on to another activity - one that builds on the vocabulary that has been discovered.

Another approach is to supply students with the target vocabulary, and then let them discover the meanings. A pair-work

crossword is particularly useful in this context, since students have to explain the vocabulary to each other. For terms they both know, this becomes an exercise in reviewing learning. For terms that one or both students do not know, this activity develops information access and explanation strategies.

Discovery learning can also be used for many other aspects of language learning, since it fosters self-directed learning, individual autonomy, and group collaboration, leading eventually to self-directed project-learning. Once students have developed the interpersonal and intrapersonal responsibility necessary for group work, in performing tasks, solving problems, accessing and presenting information (presentations, etc.), and using the language (role plays, discussion, etc.), they are ready to discover more of the target language through guided projects. Having learned how to access the information that they need, students come to understand that they do not need to learn the whole language in order to be competent in their profession. Rather, they have the skills to learn (and discover) what they need, when they need it.

## Materials Design

By Andrew Finch



Figure 1: Time to Speak, p. 77, A. E. Finch (unpublished)

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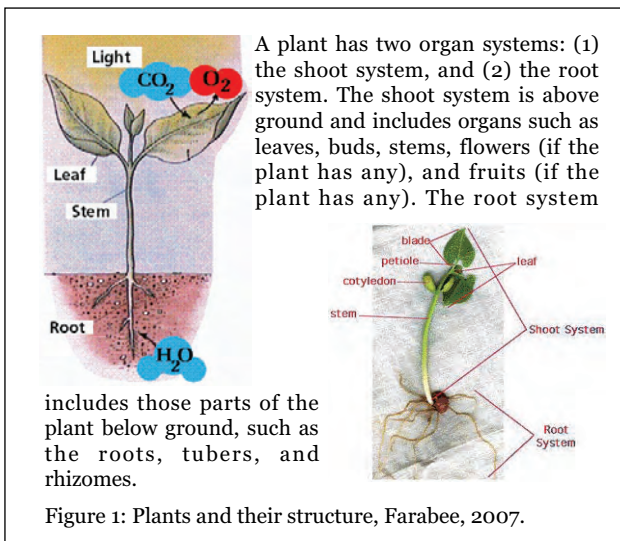
## Content-Based Materials 2

Content-based instruction is becoming more and more accepted in EFL and is finding its way into ELT curricula at all levels. A brief glance at *Google Scholar*, or a quick database search using referencing software, will reveal a wealth of books and articles on the subject, some written in the East Asian context. A few of these are offered at the end of this article.

Having decided to design content-based materials, the pre-planning stage is (as always) very important. Before setting pencil to paper or mouse to mouse pad, we need to reflect on our goals and methods. What are we trying to do? What linguistic, social, affective, psychological, and cultural needs are we addressing? What are the philosophies behind the materials? What content are we choosing, and why? Are we teaching two subjects together (e.g., English and Math) or presenting a grammar-based language syllabus in a more enjoyable, meaningful, and challenging framework? As we can see, there are many considerations and a corresponding wealth of possibilities. What, therefore, is the first step? How do we proceed?

One approach is to use the content as language input and to design an activity that focuses on linguistic, cultural, social, and affective goals. This has drawbacks since the students will not be actively exploring the content for its own value. How about starting with the *other* subject to see how language goals can be incorporated? This sounds good, and ideas spring quickly to mind. For example, when a recipe (Home Economics) or an experiment (Science) is involved, the materials can use imperatives and sequencers (*First do this. Then do this. Next do this. Finally do this.*). However, if we look at Figure 1, we can see that things are not always so straightforward.

We now have (Fig. 1) subject-specific language that is not normally found in EFL learning. Technical



vocabulary is an important feature of content-based language teaching and poses a problem. One solution is to view the two subjects (English and Biology) as equal, and to address them both. There is a lot of vocabulary to be learned and reading passages to comprehend, but before that, it could be an idea to set up some practical experiments. We could view the plants themselves as teaching materials and start growing beans in the classroom. Children could discover the names of the structure as they see the roots emerge, the shoot forming, the stem growing, and the leaves getting bigger. Perhaps students could draw the bean in its various stages and add the scientific terms as they find out about them, eventually arriving at the pictures in Figure 1.

### Materials Design

By Andrew Finch

This is discovery learning, and further materials will reflect this approach. Reading passages might be skimmed and scanned for important information, or students might be asked to explain the passages to each other, solving problems in collaboration when they come to difficult words or concepts. Whatever the approach taken, it can be seen that content-based learning offers exciting materials-design opportunities as well as difficult challenges.

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## Content-Based Materials

When students complain that they are “poor learners,” it can be instructive to find out where this statement is coming from. Very often, the assumption behind the statement is that the target language has to be learned in its entirety before one can be called “proficient.” Using this definition, it is easy to see why many Korean students see themselves as failures.

Total proficiency is obviously an impractical goal for students studying a few hours a week, especially when we consider all the different genres and technical variations (e.g., Business English, Academic English, Legal English, Medical English, Engineering English, etc.), but when we look at our textbooks, what is it exactly that they are trying to do? What language do they choose to teach, and why? One approach is to sidestep the issue of specialized English and simply teach generic language. Another approach is to concentrate on language use (grammar), with the hope that the students will be able to apply the grammar to whatever learning situation they find themselves in.

Even if we perform a comprehensive needs analysis at the beginning of a course, we are going to find that students have differing learning needs, and that one course will definitely not fit all of them. At the college level, we will find students of varying majors, who want to learn the relevant specialist languages of those majors. In order to fulfill these needs, the teacher will need to know Nursing English, Mechanical English, Scientific English, etc., as well as be able to show how these genres are used in the workplace. And doing all this does not even address teaching students how to read the highly technical journal articles.

ELT teachers thus find themselves in a dilemma. Do they offer to share their own skills (grammar, conversation, writing, etc.), or do they attempt to match the students’ needs (TOEFL, TOEIC, Technical English, Legal English, Business English, etc.)? This question is becoming all the more urgent as secondary schools in Asia begin to take on bilingual education. It is a short step from English-through-English to Other-subjects-through-English, as can be seen in the current boom in immersion learning in China, where bilingual education is seen as a way out of “the dilemma long experienced in ‘much time spent but little achieved’ foreign language education” (Feng, 2007, p. 2). David Graddol (2006) in *English Next* has also warned that most students will be learning through English (rather than learning English) in 10 to 15 years time.

In this situation, it appears that the role of the ELT

teacher is about to undergo radical change. Colleges in Korea are already asking language teachers to teach other subjects through English, and to make their own materials for doing this. However, pedagogically sound and culturally appropriate content-based language teaching books are yet to be written. Materials design has thus become more than supplementation and has taken on a new form, one in which instructors are required to produce materials about other subjects. However, this approach is more of a Pandora’s Box, raising all sorts of questions about curricula, content, and design skills.

### Materials Design

By Andrew Finch

Here is a suggested approach: <http://www.finchpark.com/books/u2u/packstoc.htm>. (Please feel free to download these files for your own use.) This approach recognizes that: (a) students at the tertiary level have been learning English for a long time in secondary education, and they need something different, rather than more of the same; (b) they need to develop learning strategies; (c) they need to develop autonomy in learning; (d) they need to learn specialist English, often not possessed by the instructor; (e) they need to learn how to teach themselves; (f) they need presentation skills; and (g) they need self-assessment skills.

How is all this to be done? More in another article.

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# Problem Solving

It is not difficult to write materials which simply provide linguistic information. We observe a problem with the students' usage, make materials that address the problem (e.g., by providing "correct" language), and give it to them to absorb and learn. Surely, everyone must be happy after this. The teacher has identified and corrected a problem, and the students have improved their grasp of the target language. If we read Dewey, Montessori, and many other educators, however, we find that learning is doing; students do not learn by imbibing information, but by constructing it for themselves. They must be involved in the language learning process, and they must be active in their discovery of the language.



Fig. 1. Face and Hands Worksheet

One solution to this situation is to make "discovery activities." As we can see in "The Face and Hands" worksheet (Fig. 1), students have to discover the relevant vocabulary by matching the words with the boxes on the page. This could be made more interesting by not supplying the words, in which case students would write in the ones they already knew (more than you might expect), ask other students about the other words, look in dictionaries, browse the Internet, or even ask the teacher. They would all be learning what they need to learn, and the teacher would not be tempted to teach vocabulary that many students already know. Finally, students would *own* the language, having discovered it through exploration and collaboration.

Another approach is to give students language problems to solve. This does not mean problems about language, but problems which require use of the target language. An excellent example of this is Operation Matlog at <http://www.vasa.abo.fi/users/rpalmber/mathlog.htm>. This has a series of language-related problems which students must solve in order to proceed from one page to the next. It is also very important to be able to comprehend and follow instructions on this web site. Students, individually and in groups, quickly become involved in solving the problems (manipulating words and ideas) and feel a great sense of achievement when they are able to access the next page.

Other types of problems set up communicative situations such as buying a train ticket or making a phone call to find out information (flight times, appointment times, etc.). In this case, communicative competence is evaluated by success in completing the task, and an error is something which impedes that success.

## Materials Design

By Andrew Finch

Finally, Figure 2 is an example of a problem that examines abilities to use arithmetic functions in

English. Notice in particular that everything is directed at the students. There is no need for the teacher to explain the instructions, since the whole activity is a set of instructions. The input language is simple and consistent. Students follow the instructions and perform the operations. At the end of this activity, they are able to assess their success by whether B's original number has been found. If it has not, then they must try again, and discover where they have made an error. Is it linguistic or arithmetic? This is a pleasing activity for students in that it gives them instant feedback, and its structured format can lead them into further self-directed exploration of the language of logic and deduction.

### Student A:

- Ask your partner to think of a number
- Ask your partner to multiply that number by 5.
- Ask your partner to add 6.
- Ask your partner to multiply the result by 4.
- Ask your partner to add 9.
- Ask your partner to multiply the result by 5.
- Ask your partner for the result,
- Without speaking** to your partner, **subtract** 165 from the result and take off two zeros from the final number. This is student B's original number! Ask Student B if this is correct.

Fig. 2. Problem-solving Activity

It is important to remember that students want to learn, but that they learn best by finding out for themselves in a meaningful context. Our job is to provide the structure for learning.

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# Pedagogic/Authentic

There are various types of materials teachers can make to fit different situations. At certain times, it is appropriate for students to practice accuracy-oriented aspects of the language, performing tasks that they would not perform outside the classroom (pedagogic materials). At other times, authentic materials (simulating real-world situations) provide fitting opportunities for students to practice a meaning-oriented use of the target language. The pedagogic/authentic distinction is one that appears to be about teaching methodology, but it is possible for both approaches to be used in any teaching practice. It is also possible for the two approaches to be combined in language learning materials.

Here are a couple of examples. In the first example, there are a number of goals. An obvious linguistic one is the rehearsal of modals *should* and *should not*. This activity can be rewritten using *could*, *must*, *have to*, and *ought to*, according to the teacher's preferences and the learning needs of the students. This is the *pedagogic* aspect. In other words, this activity functions on one level as a drill - repetition of grammatical constructs. From the *authentic* point of view, it would seem that students are not likely to make lists of things they should do in real life, but some situations can be imagined. We might tie this in with writing a diary, or giving recommendations to friends. A tourist-brochure project could well include tips for foreigners, using a similar format.

On another level, this activity aims to (a) develop a classroom community based upon shared values and respect, (b) develop personal and group responsibility, and (c) encourage awareness of desirable conditions for learning by getting the students to participate in making the rules for the learning environment. These

social and affective goals have more relevance to the outside world, and can be termed "*authentic goals*," in that they encourage teamwork (group discussion and negotiation), critical thinking, and responsibility.

The second example also has an explicit grammatical goal: the transformation of negative statements into past-tense statements. Given that some of the verbs chosen by the students will be irregular, this activity can be very useful in terms of rehearsing and understanding rules of grammar (*buy-bought, catch-caught, sell-sold, drive-driven*, etc.). We can thus state that this activity has a function that is particular to the language classroom: rehearsing grammatical transformations. It is very difficult to imagine this situation occurring in an *authentic* setting.

As with the first example, however, this activity has other aspects and functions. It supports students in realizing how language affects their perceptions and how they can use responsible statements to empower themselves. We can once more imagine a diary-writing project, one in which such personal reflection would be an *authentic* use of the language.

There are many more obvious examples in which a substitution-drill format can be used in authentic situations. For example, a survey might ask class members for their opinions on certain topics, and the questions in this survey could all use the same grammatical form. The pedagogic/authentic distinction is one of convenience, to be adopted and adapted as appropriate by the classroom professionals - the teachers.

## Materials Design

By Andrew Finch

**Learning Contract**  
 (Group if you can or make the English Classes as helpful and as enjoyable as possible)  
 • Let's make our own learning contract

There are our rules for our group.  
 If anybody breaks these rules, she/he will have to apologise to the others.

"In our English classes ....."

1. We should .....
2. We should .....
3. We should .....
4. We should .....
5. The teacher should .....
6. The teacher should .....
7. We should not .....
8. We should not .....
9. The teacher should not .....
10. The teacher should not .....

Sign: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Witness: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date: \_\_\_\_\_



**Purpose**  
 To develop a classroom community based upon shared values and respect  
 To develop personal and group responsibility  
 To rehearse modals (should, should not, would, would not, have to)

Adapted from Finch & Lopez (2000), p. 93, and Siccone & Lopez (2000), pp. 93-96

Adapted from Siccone & Lopez (2000, pp. 93-96)

**I can't / haven't yet**

- **Find a partner.**
- Take turns making sentences that are true for you, beginning with the words "I can't... Think about school life, social life, and home life.  
 E.g., I can't swim. I can't do math. I can't drive a car. I can't make many friends.
- Repeat all the sentences, using "I haven't yet ..."
- How does it feel? Is it any different?
- What does "I can't ..." really mean?

Adapted from Siccone & Lopez (2000, pp. 164-165).

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## Instructions

The purpose of having instructions in teaching materials is to tell students how to perform language tasks, so they deserve a great deal of attention from the author. For example, what level of learners do you think these instructions are aimed at? (The answers are at the bottom).

1. Match the words and pictures. Write sentences.
2. Work alone or with a partner. Look at the sentences. Each sentence has one mistake. Find the mistakes. Correct them.
3. Jason and Mi-na are a happily married couple. They are kind of a double-income family with no kids (DINK). They work very hard to stay in great shape. They always watch their diet and exercise a lot. Look at the sets of pictures below and make appropriate sentences for each set. The first set has been done for you.

These instructions progress from basic to (below) low-intermediate levels. In the first two, every word is necessary, and the instructions simply tell students what to do. The first has two steps. Students are to match the given words with the pictures on the page and then write sentences in empty boxes in the pictures. At this “starter” level, the sentences will be very simple, so there is no need to specify their form. In the second set, learners must process five concepts before beginning the task. However, the language is clear, so they should be able to do this. Otherwise, they can ask the teacher for help. This will also give valuable feedback to the teacher.

These instructions function as comprehension tests, identifying students who cannot process the language. This allows the teacher to give individual attention to these students, while the others get on with the tasks. To explain the instructions to everyone before they have tried to comprehend them defeats the whole purpose, and encourages students to wait passively for the teacher to explain.

The third set of instructions takes a different approach. This is no problem when we look at the first sentence, though we might wonder why the word “happily” was necessary. However, when we get to the second sentence, we find that “They are kind of a double-income family with no kids (DINK).” Are they happy because they are DINKs? Why do we need to know this? Why is “kind of” used? It seems ambiguous. Sentences 3 and 4 continue to supply information, and we have to wait until sentence 5 to find the main commands. Sentence 6 then explains that the first item supplies a sample answer. We thus have seven concepts (sentence 5 has two commands) in one paragraph. Students have to read the whole paragraph, sort out the information from the commands, and proceed

accordingly. Is this an appropriate task for learners at this level? Is there a way of making these instructions more user-friendly?

While it might help to itemize the information in separate lines and “signpost” the commands by bulleting them, we will still have problems. For example, why does sentence 2 use “DINK” instead of “DINKYs?” Wikipedia tells us that DINKY is short for “dual (or double) income, no kids yet,” whereas “DINK is sometimes used in reference to gay and lesbian couples who are stereotypically perceived to be childless” (Wikipedia, 2007). Furthermore, why do these people have to work “very hard” to stay in “great shape?” Finally, what does it mean to “watch their diet?” As we can see, these instructions are trying to pack a lot of information, some of it ambiguous, into a short space. They also contain idioms and vocabulary (e.g., “appropriate”) that might be too challenging for the students. It might even be a good idea to turn these instructions into a reading task by themselves.

We can see, therefore, that instructions need time and care in their design. They must tell students exactly what needs to be done, and they must contain language that is appropriate to the level of the students. If they require too much background information, then it is a good idea to turn that information into another task, which students can successfully complete beforehand.

### Answers

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# Checklists

This is the third article about materials design, and we haven't applied any ideas onto the blank page yet. However, there is a reason for this. When the creation process gets under way, the materials take shape according to the principles and beliefs of the designer. Recognizing this, the previous article was about setting the goals (cognitive, affective, social, cultural, and linguistic).

Even when the goals are identified, however, the hidden or unconscious teaching agenda will impose itself on the materials. It's a good idea, therefore, to make a checklist for the materials you design. This list can be based on principles that you believe, or believe that you believe. So today, here are some considerations for the contents of a pre-design checklist. It is easy to think that making materials just involves putting some grammar points on the page, but

as you can see, there are many more factors involved. How about using these categories to identify what you want to do, and making a checklist that will help you to design suitable materials?

## Materials Design

By Andrew Finch

### The Author



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Pre-design Checklist (Before Starting)		✓
Goals	Affective (emotional management) Cognitive (problem-solving, etc) Communicative Cultural Linguistic Social (collaboration, responsibility, etc.) Study skills (Learning how to learn)	
Input	Authentic Pedagogic	
Activity Types	Information gap Information transfer Opinion gap One-way task Two-way task Discovery task Experience task Shared task Guided task Independent task	
Teacher Role	Ringmaster (controller) Facilitator Monitor (observer) Participant	
Learner Role	Passive recipient of input. Active interactor and negotiator. Involved in a process of personal growth. Involved in social-based language learning. Taking responsibility for his/her own learning.	
Settings	Individual Pair Work Small Group Work Whole Class	

Post-design Checklist (After Finishing)		✓
1.	The materials are at the right level for the learners.	
2.	Learning impact is achieved through novelty	
3.	Learning impact is achieved through variety	
4.	Learning impact is achieved through attractive presentation.	
5.	Learning impact is achieved through appealing content	
6.	The materials expose learners to language in authentic use.	
7.	There are opportunities for self-assessment and reflection.	
8.	The materials will be perceived by learners as relevant and useful.	
9.	The materials require and facilitate learner self-investment	
10.	Learners are given opportunities to communicate.	
11.	The materials help students develop their cultural awareness.	
12.	The materials help learners to develop their cognitive skills.	
13.	The materials help students develop emotional management skills.	
14.	The materials help students develop their learning strategies	
15.	The materials help students develop their linguistics skills	
16.	The materials help students develop their social skills	
17.	The materials permit a silent period at the beginning of instruction.	
18.	The materials encourage intellectual, aesthetic and emotional involvement, which stimulates both right and left brain activities.	
19.	The materials provide opportunities for outcome feedback.	
20.	The materials take into account learners' multiple intelligences.	



## What Are My Goals?

In the previous article (TEC 10, 4), we recognized the need for EFL teachers to make their own materials. However good the textbook might be, the fact is that it was written for worldwide or countrywide distribution. It was not written specifically for the students in our classes. Writing our own materials for our own students allows us to supplement the textbook and help our students satisfy their individual learning needs. Having decided to make student-specific materials, however, we need to ask ourselves some questions before starting. Our materials will reflect our teaching philosophy, so we need to make sure exactly what we are trying to do.

It seems obvious to say that we make materials in order to help students learn English. This is often expressed as a focus on form (grammar) in the materials. But is this all we want? Are we simply making more grammar substitution drills? In view of all the factors controlling

### *Our materials will reflect our teaching philosophy.*

the learning process, we need to ask some more questions. For example, it is well known that motivated, confident students learn more effectively than demotivated students lacking in self-esteem. So we need to ask whether our materials will motivate the students and help them to become more confident. We can ask similar questions in terms of affective goals (reduction of stress, etc.), social goals (group responsibility, etc.), cognitive goals (problem solving, etc.), emotional learning goals (management of frustration, etc.), and many other factors, in addition to the usual linguistic goals.

Even then, once we have decided what sort of non-linguistic goals the materials will focus on, the

linguistic goals cannot be taken for granted. How are we going to present them? What methodology will we use (grammar-translation, audio-visual, task-based, project-based, etc.)? How will we find out how much the students have benefited from the materials (teacher-based assessment, student-based assessment, review tests, portfolios, etc.)? And how will we review their effectiveness (type of feedback)?

Yes, it's taking a long time to get to the actual writing, but our assumptions about teaching and learning control everything we make. If we don't want to end up with "more of the same" boring, ineffective textbook materials, we need to look at those assumptions!

In conclusion, here is a checklist of questions to ask before the pen hits the paper, or before the fingers hit the keys. The choices will be different for everyone, depending on the students' needs and on the teachers' preferred teaching styles. However, the process of asking these questions will have a positive effect on the final materials.

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## A Quote to Ponder

"The learning of a foreign language involves far more than simply learning skills, or a system of rules, or a grammar, it involves the adoption of new social and cultural behaviors and ways of being, and therefore has a significant impact on the social nature of the learner."

*Psychology for Language Teachers*  
Marion Williams & Robert L. Burden (1997, p. 115)

**What are my lesson goals?**

<input type="checkbox"/> Assessment	<input type="checkbox"/> Learner training	<input type="checkbox"/> Grammar
<input type="checkbox"/> Attitude change	<input type="checkbox"/> Non-verbal communication	<input type="checkbox"/> Pronunciation
<input type="checkbox"/> Autonomous learning	<input type="checkbox"/> Promotion of confidence	<input type="checkbox"/> Structure
<input type="checkbox"/> Communication skills	<input type="checkbox"/> Promotion of motivation	<input type="checkbox"/> Vocabulary
<input type="checkbox"/> Development of study skills	<input type="checkbox"/> Reduction of anxiety	<input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Feedback on the course	<input type="checkbox"/> Reflection on learning	

**What is the teacher's role?**

<input type="checkbox"/> Controller	<input type="checkbox"/> Friend	<input type="checkbox"/> Materials designer
<input type="checkbox"/> Counselor	<input type="checkbox"/> Language guide	<input type="checkbox"/> Mentor
<input type="checkbox"/> Dispenser of knowledge	<input type="checkbox"/> Language resource	<input type="checkbox"/> Role model
<input type="checkbox"/> Expert	<input type="checkbox"/> Leader	<input type="checkbox"/> Syllabus designer
<input type="checkbox"/> Facilitator	<input type="checkbox"/> Manager	

**What is the students' role?**

<input type="checkbox"/> Absorbers of knowledge	<input type="checkbox"/> Discoverers	<input type="checkbox"/> Language consumers
<input type="checkbox"/> Apprentices	<input type="checkbox"/> Experimenters	<input type="checkbox"/> Recipients of knowledge
<input type="checkbox"/> Co-syllabus designers	<input type="checkbox"/> Independent agents	<input type="checkbox"/> Researchers
<input type="checkbox"/> Decision-makers	<input type="checkbox"/> Investigators	<input type="checkbox"/> Self-evaluators

**What are the lesson methods?**

<input type="checkbox"/> Teacher-controlled: Present-Practice-Perform
<input type="checkbox"/> Student-sequenced activities (sequence chosen by the students)
<input type="checkbox"/> Teacher-sequenced activities (sequence chosen by the students)
<input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty-sequenced activities (activities sequenced by difficulty)
<input type="checkbox"/> Task-type-sequenced activities (e.g., static tasks, then dynamic tasks, then independent tasks)

**What is the lesson content?**

<input type="checkbox"/> Assessment activities	<input type="checkbox"/> Movie scripts from the Internet
<input type="checkbox"/> Communicative activities	<input type="checkbox"/> Questionnaires from the Internet.
<input type="checkbox"/> Comprehension activities	<input type="checkbox"/> Song lyrics from the Internet
<input type="checkbox"/> Grammar activities	<input type="checkbox"/> Student resources on the Internet
<input type="checkbox"/> Learning-centered activities	<input type="checkbox"/> Teacher resources on the Internet
<input type="checkbox"/> Listening activities	<input type="checkbox"/> Teaching materials from the Internet
<input type="checkbox"/> Reading activities	<input type="checkbox"/> Word-games from the Internet
<input type="checkbox"/> Speaking activities	<input type="checkbox"/> Group work
<input type="checkbox"/> Writing activities	<input type="checkbox"/> Pairwork
<input type="checkbox"/> Integrated activities	<input type="checkbox"/> Individual work
<input type="checkbox"/> Reflective activities	<input type="checkbox"/> Role plays
<input type="checkbox"/> Vocabulary activities	<input type="checkbox"/> Questionnaires
<input type="checkbox"/> Introduction of educational sites on the Internet	<input type="checkbox"/> Substitution drills
<input type="checkbox"/> Crosswords from the Internet	<input type="checkbox"/> Peer dictation
<input type="checkbox"/> Discussion topics from the Internet	<input type="checkbox"/> Teacher dictation
<input type="checkbox"/> Grammar puzzles from the Internet	<input type="checkbox"/> Teacher presentation of learning content
<input type="checkbox"/> Lesson plans from the Internet	

## Introducing the Need

As language teachers, especially as EFL teachers working with ESL books, we are frequently confronted with books that are not suitable for our students. This is not surprising. Even though major publishing companies try to make books that can be used worldwide, the fact is that every country, every group of learners in every institution, and even every individual student has different needs, which cannot be met by a one-size-fits-all approach. Our task is to research those needs (via action research) and take appropriate action (via materials design).

But what action can we take? There have been articles written on doing away with the textbook, but depending on where we work, it is rare for EFL teachers to have this option. Instead, we are often faced with collections of teaching/learning materials that are boring, at the wrong level, culturally inappropriate, pedagogically unsound, or just plain wrong for our students.

However, all is not lost. Despite the, sometimes hidden, assumptions and restrictions of “teacher-proof” curricula and textbooks, we are professionals; we can analyze student needs, discover teaching goals in textbooks, and make supplementary learning materials that satisfy both requirements (real learning needs and dubious textbook goals). In this way, we are giving the administrators what they want, while giving our

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### *The focus is on showing how teachers can make materials.*

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students what they need.

This might sound like a lofty claim, but the fact is that most ELT textbooks have a number of problems which impede successful language learning in local or regional situations:

- They are written for the ESL environment, in which learners practice English outside the classroom. They are therefore form-focused, rather than performance-focused.
- They contain large amounts of grammar, on the assumption that the learners (e.g., immigrants to the US or Australia) need this input.
- They contain many “model” dialogues which contain language styles and content which are inappropriate for our students.
- They present the white Anglo-Saxon cultures of the US/UK/Australia/NZ/Canada as desirable life-goals for the students, ignoring the cultural preferences of, for example, businesspeople in Asia, who use English as a common L2 for negotiation.

- They assume that the variants of English spoken in native-speaking countries are superior to Regional Englishes, despite the “World Englishes” movement, which tells a completely different story of regional self-respect, both linguistic and cultural.
- They are often based on outdated principles of language teaching (e.g., grammar-translation, audio-lingual learning, skills-based learning).

In view of these problems, we can appreciate that local teachers are the best people to make materials suited to the needs of their students. Teachers know their

students’ strengths and weaknesses. Whatever the syllabus, therefore, local teachers are the best people to design,

implement, and evaluate the effectiveness of learning materials. They are at ground zero, in that they are on-the-spot, aware of factors that textbook writers living in other countries cannot imagine.

The purpose of this column is therefore to show how teachers can make materials, both on a class level, and on an individual level. These materials can supplement the textbook, or they can be independent of it. They can focus on learning goals as specified by the curriculum, or as practically necessary for specific students. They can be aimed a certain level of proficiency, or they can be multilevel, allowing students to find learning affordances that suit them. They can be closed tasks, or they can extend into ongoing projects. They can focus on a particular skill, or they can be integrated tasks. They can include cognitive, affective, and social learning goals, in addition to linguistic ones. At all events, they can be free of cultural and linguistic “hidden agendas,” and they can be designed to meet the needs of the students.

This introduction has laid down the reasons for the appearance of this column. Future versions won’t be as text-dense. Now it is time to begin the task of making pedagogically sound materials that satisfy the learning needs of our students.

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