

CREATIVE WAYS TO USE AUTHENTIC MATERIALS FOR TEACHING ENGLISH

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Abstract

Authentic material is any material written in English that was not created for intentional use in the English language classroom. Using this content to teach the English language can make the learning process even more engaging, imaginative and motivating for students. here are several reasons for this, primarily a kind of fear that students will panic when faced with language that is largely unfamiliar, and a feeling that to prevent this the language should be edited to the students' level. This is an unnecessary fear, as using authentic materials can be rewarding and stimulating for both teacher and students. Unlike the ESL materials, worksheets, study guides and other lesson plans you download from the web, authentic materials are resources created for native speakers of the target language.

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INTRODUCTION

When people first think of authentic materials, they usually assume that we are talking about newspaper and magazine articles. However, the term can also encompass such things as songs, web pages, radio & TV broadcasts, films, leaflets, flyers, posters, indeed anything written in the target language and used unedited in the classroom.

Why choose authentic materials? Well, let us have a look at some of their advantages.

1. Authentic materials bring learners into direct contact with a reality level of teaching English.
2. Authentic materials drawn from periodicals are always up-to-date and constantly being updated.



3. Authentic materials from a particular source, such as language learners, tend to work in consistent areas of language, so, after a while, students who practice reading language materials will become experts in reading English language publications.
4. Authentic materials provide us with a source of up-to-date materials that can be directly relevant to business English learners' needs.

The materials used, will of course, depend on the '*usual*' factors:

- topic
- target language area
- skills
- students' needs and interests

LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

It is no good trying to get your students fascinated by a text on the latest art movie if they are all fans of action films. You might as well save your time and energy and just use the text book! Aren't authentic materials too difficult? Yes, they are, but that is the point! Your text, written or recorded, is likely to be too hard, even, in some cases, for advanced students. The trick, regardless of the text used, is not to edit and grade the text, but to grade the task according to your students' abilities. This is for three reasons: most importantly, it reflects the kind of situation your students may face in an English-speaking environment, it saves you time and energy (more of an added bonus than a reason) and lastly it encourages and motivates your students when they can '*conquer*' a real text.

An example:

The same text could be used in a variety of different ways. Let us take a tourist information leaflet. This kind of authentic material has the added advantage that it can be easily and swiftly ordered for free and in multiple copies from tourist boards and agencies. This also removes issues of copyright, which is a common problem of using authentic materials and should be checked depending on your particular situation. (Some countries allow a small number of copies to be made for educational purposes, but this can vary.)

- With a little pre-teaching a low level class can use the leaflet to find out key information, '*What is the telephone number for..?*' or '*When is..?*' and so on.



• At higher levels the same text could be used together with similar or related texts to form part of a research project (in this case, web sites, posters and similar leaflets spring to mind).

There are no reading comprehension tests and vocabulary sections at the end of an article to quiz students' understanding.

To get your mind thinking of all the possibilities, authentic materials can include:

- **Listening:** TV shows, radio, commercials, news broadcasts, documentaries, movies, phone messages, etc.
- **Visual:** photographs, art works, signs with symbols, postcards, picture books, etc.
- **Printed:** restaurant menus, newspaper articles, bulletin board advertisements, company websites, coupons, sales catalogues, travel brochures, maps, telephone books, signs, blogs, movie posters, food labels, etc.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Give your students authentic materials to boost their confidence and experience “real” language with the support of constructive feedback.

The main benefits of using real English are clear. By using authentic materials, students will encounter words and constructions that they would probably never see in formal ESL materials. They will learn abbreviations when looking and handwritten notes, and hear the true tone, see body language and encounter filler “umm”s of native speakers when listening.

If listening to an authentic audio source, students will also have to filter out the background noises, and at times really concentrate to understand friends talking over one another. It could prove more challenging than clear ESL recordings, but it is a taste of what is really out there.

Authentic materials will no-doubt expose your students to culture, so you can actually take the context into consideration instead of just looking at how language is used.

The fact that these resources are the real deal will also increase students' motivation and better meet the learner's needs. The goal is to understand and use English in real life, so using authentic resources will teach the student what he or she needs to know to get there.



Maximize the benefits of authentic materials in your ESL lesson by evaluating its content and readability. Ask yourself these questions:

Q1: Is the content relevant or interesting?

Try to pick topics that are relevant and of interest to your students. While you may be a fan of the American Revolution, your students may be overwhelmed by the names, geographic locations, dates and other theoretical facts.

Providing materials that are both practical and applicable can spark interest, while helping students to see the relevance of ESL classroom lessons in real life.

Q2: Is the length appropriate?

The length of the content can cost your lesson (and your students) more than you ever imagined. Do not scare your students off with a lengthy article. Instead, provide articles that could be finished in a two-hour class period or less.

Q3: How difficult is the content or subject?

Remember to choose material that is linguistically appropriate. Before handing out authentic materials, make sure you read through them to plan lessons and in-class activities that will reinforce a known idea, teach a new word or explain a complex concept.

Authentic materials bridge the gap between classroom language use and real life language use by bringing familiar linguistic situations and materials right into the classroom. When teachers use authentic materials, they are in fact helping ESL students to make a comfortable transition into the L2 culture.

Give your students some weather reports and ask them to apply for a few jobs on the web to make learning a part of their everyday life. Your students will appreciate the lessons and remember new words much better when they need to use them for survival.

So let us put away the ESL workbooks and experiment with the “real stuff” out there!

CONCLUSION

As can be seen, using authentic materials is a relatively easy and convenient way of improving not only your students' general skills, but also their confidence in a real situation. This is only a brief introduction to the ideas involved, but some of these ideas could easily be expanded to form part of a motivating and effective course.



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