

TEACHER'S CORNER – MAY 2018

TEACHING WITH AUTHENTIC MATERIALS

Many English classes come with a textbook or curriculum for instructors to follow. This can be helpful when designing a course, determining learning outcomes, and assessing students. It also makes it easy for teachers to plan lessons and introduce concepts to students in a logical sequence.

There are many potential benefits to using prescribed curricula or materials to teach. However, these resources are not provided by every institution and even when they are, they often lack an authentic context in which students can practice English. In cases where these resources are not provided for a course, or where instructors wish to expose students to highly engaging opportunities to practice English, using authentic materials is an excellent option.

WHAT ARE AUTHENTIC MATERIALS?

One description of authentic materials says that their purpose is to communicate meaning and information and that they are produced for real communication rather than to teach language (Thomas, 2014). Authentic materials for the English language classroom are often free and very easy to find online or perhaps in certain locations in your communities. Here are some examples:

- TV shows, news segments, documentaries, movie clips and trailers, online videos, and commercials
- Radio broadcasts, songs, and podcasts
- Photographs, artwork, signs, postcards, maps, and advertisements
- Magazines, letters and emails, news articles, brochures, websites, blogs, and social media posts
- Recipes, food labels, bus and train schedules, menus, and price tags and product descriptions

This month in the Teacher's Corner, we will discuss different types of authentic materials and the benefits and challenges of using them. We will also explore teaching strategies to use with these materials in the English language classroom. Activities will focus on activating and building students' background knowledge, increasing vocabulary, supporting comprehension, and including summative tasks. Ideas presented can be adapted to use with any type of authentic material you choose for your students.

SELECTING AUTHENTIC MATERIALS

Authentic materials are an excellent resource in any teaching context. Sometimes educators work at institutions that provide lots of materials, while others may only provide a few or none at all. How to incorporate authentic materials depends on each teacher's preference and teaching situation. Materials can supplement an existing curriculum or textbook or can even serve as the basis for an entire course.

For instance, perhaps a textbook provides a unit on the simple past tense with practice dialogues and exercises for students to complete. An instructor could use different news clips or articles in English to have students apply what they learned about the simple past tense. Learners could watch the clips or read articles in small groups, and then use the simple past tense to write a summary of the news event to present to the class. A teacher might choose to use this type of activity regularly, perhaps as a weekly news overview that allows students to practice different targeted grammatical structures by presenting the news to classmates.

BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF USING AUTHENTIC MATERIALS

Using authentic materials can have benefits and challenges just like any other instructional resource. However, with careful consideration, educators can find materials that benefit students and minimize potential difficulties.

Authentic materials are beneficial because they show a real-world use of language and often present content that is of high interest to students. Most authentic materials present current topics in news or culture or help students learn information that is useful in their everyday lives. For this reason, using authentic materials often increases students' motivation and willingness to take risks with English.

Real materials, unlike materials made specifically for teaching, are not created with certain grammatical structures or vocabulary in mind. Instead they provide an opportunity for students

to read or hear language as it is used in a real-life situation. This can help advance students' language learning by exposing them to new vocabulary and grammatical concepts in a meaningful way.

There are possible challenges when using authentic materials for English instruction. Some time-dependent resources like news stories or social media posts can quickly become outdated. Although these items may work well in a current course, they may not be useful at a later time.

Some materials can pose a challenge for beginner or even intermediate students. English language learners may have trouble with vocabulary and grammar structures in materials created for a fluent audience. To address this challenge, teachers have to plan thoughtful ways for students to interact with these materials.

SELECTING AUTHENTIC MATERIALS

Using the definition from this month's Introduction, we think about authentic materials as any materials that use language to communicate information and meaning (Thomas, 2014). This description opens up a wealth of possible resources, most of which are free and easily accessible on the internet or perhaps in our everyday lives.

There are some key questions to consider when selecting authentic materials to use with your students:

- What concept, skill, or language structure will students practice? How do I want my students to be able to use language, and how will this resource help them learn or practice?
- What is the language proficiency level of my students? What support will they need in order to access the content of the materials?
- What topics are interesting to my students?
- Do my students interact with English in their everyday lives? If so, in what contexts or settings do they use English? If not, what types of materials can I incorporate into instruction to motivate them to use English outside of the classroom?

Thinking about the answers to these questions will help you select materials that will allow students to practice targeted language skills, interact with English in a meaningful and relevant way, and maintain a high level of interest and motivation.

Here again is the list of some authentic resources that can be used for instruction, also shared in the introduction:

- TV shows, news segments, documentaries, movie clips and trailers, online videos, and commercials
- Radio broadcasts, songs, and podcasts
- Photographs, artwork, signs, postcards, maps, and advertisements
- Magazines, letters and emails, news articles, brochures, websites, blogs, and social media posts
- Recipes, food labels, bus and train schedules, menus, and price tags and product descriptions

Next week's Teacher's Corner will share strategies to help students access their background knowledge about the different topics presented through authentic materials.

INTRODUCING TOPICS AND ACTIVATING STUDENTS' BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

Last week's installment of the Teacher's Corner discussed questions to consider when selecting authentic materials as well as possible benefits and challenges when using them in instruction. This week will focus on warm-ups and activities to help students connect to authentic materials and create a meaningful context for practicing English.

THINKING MAP

Time: 10 minutes

Goals:

- To encourage students to consider what experience they have with a topic or what they already know about it (their background knowledge).
- To participate in a discussion in English.
- To read and write in English.

Materials: Writing utensils and paper for each group of students, or a chalkboard/whiteboard and chalk/markers if the activity will be completed as a class

Preparation:

1. Consider the authentic materials you plan to use with your students. Use the materials to create a few questions for students to consider when creating their thinking map. Some example questions are shown below.

Authentic Material	Questions for Students to Consider
Recipe for bread	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What types of bread do you eat? • What ingredients are needed to make bread? • What are the steps to making bread?
News clip or article about popular celebrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is this celebrity? What is his or her name? • What do you know about him or her? What makes them famous?
Brochure or website for an international travel agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you were going to travel to a different country, what steps would you take to prepare? • What would you pack for your trip?

2. Decide if you will have students create thinking maps in small groups or as a whole class.

Procedure:

1. Explain to students that they will soon participate in an activity to examine a recipe (or article, website, etc.). Tell students that first, they will think carefully about what they may already know about the topic.
2. Model how to create the thinking map by writing the topic in a circle on the board. For instance, topics from the examples in the table above would be *bread*, [*celebrity name*], and *international travel*. In the following steps we will use the recipe for bread as an example.
3. Write the questions that you want students to consider on the board.
4. Model your thought process for students: Say “One type of bread that I eat for breakfast is *roti canai*, so I’m going to add that to the map.” Draw a line out from the circled topic and write the words *roti canai* at the end of the line.
5. Continue by saying “I know that flour is used to make bread, and that some types of bread require time for the dough to rest.” Add two more lines to the map and write *flour* and *time for dough to rest* to continue modeling for students.
6. Answer any questions students have about the process for creating the thinking map. If students will work in small groups, distribute necessary materials and have students form

groups. If the whole class will work together on one map, allow students to contribute ideas by coming up to the board to add information.

7. Stop the activity after about 10 minutes or when students have finished adding all of their ideas to the map. If students worked in small groups, display the maps in different areas of the room and allow the class time to move around and read all of the ideas each group wrote down.
8. If you choose, the map(s) can remain on display in the classroom as students continue to work with the materials about the topic.

Variations:

1. Allow beginner-level students to include illustrations or words in their native language on the thinking map if needed. They can discuss what they drew or wrote and the class or a peer can help them label it in English.
2. Students' background knowledge can also be activated by completing a similar activity to create a word cloud or word splash. Word clouds or word splashes are simply groups of words or phrases about a topic written in a large bunch. The words are often written in different sizes and in different directions. These can be created on paper or online using free generators such as www.wordle.net or www.wordclouds.com. A word splash can be created by using guiding questions as in the activity above or by using a photograph or single word or topic.

ANTICIPATION GUIDE

Time: 10 minutes

Goals:

- To encourage students to consider their existing level of knowledge or their opinions about a topic.
- To read and participate in a discussion in English.

Materials: Notebooks and pencils, a way to display statements for all students to see (e.g., a chalkboard/whiteboard or projector), prepared statements about the topic

Note: An anticipation guide activity works best with topics about which people usually have strong opinions or different levels of experience. News stories, documentaries, or materials that reflect things students might do in their own lives work best.

Preparation:

1. Consider the topic presented by the authentic material your students will be using. Think about the different opinions and levels of familiarity your students might have about this topic.
2. Prepare a set of 5-8 statements inspired by the topic. As an example, let's assume the authentic material being used is a travel brochure (this was also an example in the table in the Thinking Map activity, above). The table below contains some example statements inspired by a travel brochure.
3. Decide how students should respond to the statements. They can label each statement true or false, indicate if they agree or disagree, rate their level of agreement on a scale of 1-5, etc. (If using a rating scale, the following levels can be helpful: 1 = disagree, 2 = mostly disagree, 3 = unsure/neutral, 4 = mostly agree, 5 = agree).

Authentic Material and Topic	Example Statements
<p>Material: Brochure or website for an international travel agency</p> <p>Topic: International travel</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. International travel helps open people's minds to different cultures and ways of living. 2. International travel costs too much and is not really worth the money. 3. Traveling to different countries is a valuable way to spend time. 4. I would enjoy traveling to any country in the world. 5. It takes a lot of time and effort to organize an international trip.

Procedure:

1. Explain to students that they will soon participate in an activity to examine a brochure (or news clip, article, website, etc.). Tell the class that first, they will respond to a set of statements about the topic.
2. Tell students how you expect them to respond to the statements (true/false, agree/disagree, rating scale, etc.).
3. To provide students with an example, you display the first statement and model your thinking. For example, if you were using a rating scale, you could say, “Well, I think this is false,” or “I agree with this statement, but not all the time, so I’ll rate this a 4.”
4. Answer any questions the class may have.
5. Display the statements you have prepared or write them on the board. Explain to students that they will copy the statements into their notebooks and then indicate how they feel about each one. Tell students they should think carefully and prepare to justify their opinions in a discussion.
6. Give students time to copy the statements, consider how they feel about them, and make notes in their notebooks. This should take about 5 minutes.
7. When students have completed the task, explain that they will share their responses and reasoning with classmates. This can be done in several ways. Students can share with a partner, move around the room and find a new partner for each statement, or share in small groups.
8. To wrap up this activity, have students return to their seats. Ask the class to share any similarities or differences of opinion they encountered as they shared ideas with classmates.

Extensions:

1. Have students keep these statements to refer to later. After completing more activities with the authentic material, students can revisit and reconsider the statements and note whether their feelings have stayed the same or changed and why. Follow the same steps from the procedure above and have students discuss why their feelings stayed the same or changed as a result of the lesson.

The two activities presented this week will help students consider what they know or how they feel about a topic before interacting with authentic materials. Activities like this can help build students' confidence and motivation before they encounter authentic materials that may contain unfamiliar language structures or vocabulary. A warm-up that activates students' background knowledge and introduces a topic in an accessible way is beneficial regardless of a student's English proficiency level.

Next week's Teacher's Corner will discuss strategies for using authentic materials to teach and practice vocabulary words.

USING AUTHENTIC MATERIALS TO DEVELOP VOCABULARY

The previous installment of the Teacher's Corner shared strategies for introducing students to topics and exploring what they already know about them. This week will present ideas about how to use authentic materials to develop students' English vocabulary through exposure to and interaction with new words.

One challenge to consider when using authentic materials is that some of the vocabulary may be unfamiliar to your learners. For this reason, it is important to provide opportunities for students to learn new words and interact with them. Sometimes it is helpful for teachers to pre-select new words to teach students, and other times it is more beneficial for students to select the words themselves. Regardless, when special attention is given to unfamiliar words, authentic materials can provide a meaningful context for students to increase vocabulary.

The first activity this week is a great way to teach vocabulary in context. If you don't have a way to access and display photos, you can still use this strategy to teach words without using photos by creating sentences that relate to the topic of your authentic material.

PHOTO VOCABULARY

Time: 40 minutes

Goals:

- To increase students' understanding of new vocabulary words before interacting with an authentic text.
- To listen, speak, read, and write in English.

Materials: Student notebooks and pencils, list of 5-10 vocabulary words from the authentic text (can be teacher or student selected), a photo or photo collage that can be displayed for all

students to see (this can also come from the authentic material if it contains photos), one sentence that relates to the picture(s) for each vocabulary word

Preparation:

1. Determine whether you or your students will select the vocabulary words from the authentic material you plan to use. You or your students should skim the material and list words that may be difficult or unfamiliar. If students are completing this step, you will need to have them do so at least one day ahead of this activity so that you have time to prepare.

Word	Example Sentence	My Guess	Definition
1.	1.	1.	1.
2.	2.	2.	2.
3.	3.	3.	3.

2. Keeping the list of words and the topic presented by the authentic material in mind, find images that can be used to discuss the topic and vocabulary. If the authentic material includes photos, they might work well for this activity. You can use one photograph or a series of related photos arranged in a collage format. A maximum of 5-6 photos is suggested so that students are not overwhelmed. Decide how you will display the photograph(s) so that all students can see them clearly.
3. Write sentences about the photograph(s) using the vocabulary list. Write one sentence for each word and be sure that the sentence conveys what the word means.

Procedure:

1. Tell students that they will be learning new vocabulary words from the selected authentic material by looking at pictures and talking about them. Write this vocabulary chart on the board for students to copy into their notebooks.

2. Display the photograph(s) you selected to teach students the vocabulary. Explain that you will present a word and write it in the chart. Students should also write it down in their vocabulary chart. Then, you will read a sentence related to the photo(s) that contains the word. You will write it on the board and instruct students to copy it in their notebooks.
3. Tell students that after they have copied the example sentence, they will discuss what they think the word means based on the sentence and the photograph(s). They should write any notes, clues, or guesses about the meaning in the My Guess column in their notebooks. This can include the part of speech, native language cognates, clues from the sentence, inferences based on the photo(s), or what group members may already know about the word.
4. Explain that after students have recorded their guesses, a few can share with the class. Then, the teacher will provide the definition or students can look it up themselves and record it in the table.
5. Answer any questions students have. Then, start the process with the first vocabulary word.
6. Repeat the steps with each of the words until all of the words on the list have been taught.

The following activities are a great way to provide students with more practice using new words after the Photo Vocabulary activity. One of these short activities can be used each day or every other day, depending on how long your students are working with the same authentic material. Students can also repeat the activities multiple times with different partners or groups.

VARIOUS ACTIVITIES TO PROVIDE MULTIPLE INTERACTIONS WITH NEW WORDS

Time: About 15 minutes per activity

Goals:

- To provide students with additional opportunities to practice new vocabulary words.
- To listen, speak, read, and write in English.

Materials: Vocabulary charts in students' notebooks from the Photo Vocabulary activity or words and definitions from any other method you have used to teach new words, pencils, index cards or small pieces of paper, student notebooks

ACTIVITY ONE: PARTNER QUIZ

Procedure:

1. Have students get into pairs and decide who will be partner 1 and who will be partner 2.
2. To start, partner 1 should have the Vocabulary Chart in front of them and partner 2 should not. Depending on the level of your students, you may want to provide a list of the vocabulary words on the board as a support.
3. Using the chart, partner 1 will give partner 2 clues about one of the words. They could read the example sentence and leave out the vocabulary word, provide a definition, or make up their own clues (part of speech, synonyms, antonyms, etc.). Partner 2 should try to guess which word partner 1 is referring to.
4. Repeat the process until partner 2 has successfully guessed all of the words. Then, partners switch roles and repeat.

ACTIVITY TWO: VOCABULARY TRIO

Preparation:

1. Gather index cards or small pieces of paper, enough for every student in your class to have one.
2. Determine how many groups of 3 students can be formed from your class. If you have extra students left, you can also participate in the activity.

Procedure:

1. Divide your class into thirds as evenly as possible. Assign each third one part of the vocabulary chart: word, example sentence, or definition. Be sure that each group knows which part of the chart they have been assigned.
2. Explain to students that they will be responsible for writing either a word, definition, or example sentence for their assigned part of the chart on their index card/paper. Tell

students in the example sentence group to replace the vocabulary word with a blank when they write down the sentence.

3. Within each third, have students count off 1-10 (or up to as many vocabulary words as are on the list), repeating as needed. Tell students to use the chart to write down the corresponding word, definition, or sentence for their number. For instance, a student with the number 4 in the example sentence group would write down the example sentence for the 4th word in the chart, a student with the number 8 in the definition group would write down the definition for the 8th word in the chart, etc.
4. Once students have written down their assigned information, collect all the cards and mix them up.
5. Tell students that they will get a new card that will contain a word, sentence, or definition. Once a signal is given, students should move around the room and compare cards with others to try to form a trio that matches the word, example sentence, and definition correctly.

ACTIVITY THREE: EXCHANGE AND FILL IN THE BLANK

Procedure:

1. Have students get into groups of three and work together to write sentences in their notebooks using the vocabulary words. If helpful, you can display the photos from the Photo Vocabulary activity for students to refer to.
2. Have each group copy their sentences on a new sheet of paper, leaving a blank where the vocabulary words go.
3. Then have groups exchange papers. Group members work together to fill in the missing vocabulary words using the chart in their notebooks.
4. When finished, students return their completed sentences to the group that wrote them so they can check for accuracy.

The last Teacher's Corner for this month will focus on strategies to support students' comprehension when working with authentic materials. Additionally, suggestions for final activities to help students summarize their learning will be presented.

INTRODUCING TOPICS AND ACTIVATING STUDENTS' BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

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THINKING MAP

Time: 10 minutes

Goals:

- To encourage students to consider what experience they have with a topic or what they already know about it (their background knowledge).
- To participate in a discussion in English.
- To read and write in English.

Materials: Writing utensils and paper for each group of students, or a chalkboard/whiteboard and chalk/markers if the activity will be completed as a class

Preparation:

1. Consider the authentic materials you plan to use with your students. Use the materials to create a few questions for students to consider when creating their thinking map. Some example questions are shown below.

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Brochure or website for an international travel agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you were going to travel to a different country, what steps would you take to prepare? • What would you pack for your trip?

2. Decide if you will have students create thinking maps in small groups or as a whole class.

Procedure:

1. Explain to students that they will soon participate in an activity to examine a recipe (or article, website, etc.). Tell students that first, they will think carefully about what they may already know about the topic.
2. Model how to create the thinking map by writing the topic in a circle on the board. For instance, topics from the examples in the table above would be *bread*, [*celebrity name*], and *international travel*. In the following steps we will use the recipe for bread as an example.
3. Write the questions that you want students to consider on the board.
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5. Continue by saying “I know that flour is used to make bread, and that some types of bread require time for the dough to rest.” Add two more lines to the map and write *flour* and *time for dough to rest* to continue modeling for students.
6. Answer any questions students have about the process for creating the thinking map. If students will work in small groups, distribute necessary materials and have students form

groups. If the whole class will work together on one map, allow students to contribute ideas by coming up to the board to add information.

7. Stop the activity after about 10 minutes or when students have finished adding all of their ideas to the map. If students worked in small groups, display the maps in different areas of the room and allow the class time to move around and read all of the ideas each group wrote down.
8. If you choose, the map(s) can remain on display in the classroom as students continue to work with the materials about the topic.

Variations:

1. Allow beginner-level students to include illustrations or words in their native language on the thinking map if needed. They can discuss what they drew or wrote and the class or a peer can help them label it in English.
2. Students' background knowledge can also be activated by completing a similar activity to create a word cloud or word splash. Word clouds or word splashes are simply groups of words or phrases about a topic written in a large bunch. The words are often written in different sizes and in different directions. These can be created on paper or online using free generators such as www.wordle.net or www.wordclouds.com. A word splash can be created by using guiding questions as in the activity above or by using a photograph or single word or topic.

ANTICIPATION GUIDE

Time: 10 minutes

Goals:

- To encourage students to consider their existing level of knowledge or their opinions about a topic.
- To read and participate in a discussion in English.

Materials: Notebooks and pencils, a way to display statements for all students to see (e.g., a chalkboard/whiteboard or projector), prepared statements about the topic

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7. When students have completed the task, explain that they will share their responses and reasoning with classmates. This can be done in several ways. Students can share with a partner, move around the room and find a new partner for each statement, or share in small groups.
8. To wrap up this activity, have students return to their seats. Ask the class to share any similarities or differences of opinion they encountered as they shared ideas with classmates.

Extensions:

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