


Do you sometimes feel that you use course books as a crutch rather than a point of departure for learning? If that's the case, you may need to include more lessons based around authentic material in your teaching programme. This lesson looks at the pros and cons of this kind of material and outlines a procedure of how to exploit authentic materials for classroom use.

Task 1 – Jan's mixed feedback

Jan used an authentic newspaper article with her learners. Some students said they really enjoyed reading some "real English". However, others said they found the text too hard and indicated they would like to stick to the course book in future.



Can you help Jan? What should she do? Jot down your ideas and suggestions on a note pad, then look at the answer key below. 



Task 1 Feedback

Sticking to the course book is the easy option. Trying to use authentic material again is going to be more challenging as many students will be resistant to it. It is possible that the task that Jan used with the article was too challenging and she may need to consider making the task more straightforward for weaker students. It might also pay to let students know why she is using authentic material. In other words, she might need to "sell" it to some degree to the students in the class who felt challenged by the text she used.

Key Skill

Using authentic material with learners can add variety to a teaching programme. However, if students are not used to working with material of this nature, it needs to be introduced gradually and carefully. The next task will give you ideas on how you can "sell" authentic material to your students.

Task 2 – The pros and cons



Numbers 1 to 4 below are features of authentic material. Letters a to h are pros and cons that match the features. For each feature there is one pro and one con. Match the pros and cons to the features.

Features	Pros	Cons
1. Authentic texts often contain cultural information.		
2. Authentic texts are often quite long.		
3. Authentic texts can be very topical.		
4. Authentic texts can be used regularly in the classroom.		

Pros & cons

- a. It can be difficult to fit them into the timeframe of a 90 or 120 minute lesson.
- b. It can make the teaching programme appear 'bitsy' and students don't get a feeling they are working through a coherent syllabus.
- c. Students are often very interested in this kind of information and they find it very motivating.
- d. This means the material can date very quickly.
- e. This kind of background information can sometimes be more difficult to understand than the language.
- f. It can make a good break from the course book.
- g. This means students can get good extensive reading or listening practice.
- h. This can make your classroom material very relevant to students.

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Key Skill

There are arguments against using authentic material, certainly if you use too much of it. However, teachers can often anticipate problems and deal with these when they plan authentic materials. For example, difficult cultural information can be dealt with when leading in to an authentic text and longer texts can be edited to accommodate lesson time. One issue not indicated in task 2 is that of copyright. This differs from country to country and from one institution to another. However, it is important to ensure you have copyright clearance on a piece of material before you use it.

Task 3 – Authentic texts and their uses



Numbers 1 to 8 describe different kinds of authentic text. Letters a to h describe aims that relate to these texts. Match the aims to the texts.

Authentic texts	Aims
1. A TV guide for one day's viewing.	
2. An e-mail message between friends.	
3. A radio weather forecast.	
4. A series of magazine advertisements.	
5. An editorial from a newspaper.	
6. A recording of someone speaking about a childhood memory.	
7. A reality TV show.	
8. A timetable for a package holiday.	

Aims

- a. To provide practice in inferring meaning from a discursive text.
- b. To provide practice in listening for narrative gist.
- c. To clarify and practise the first conditional used for making promises.
- d. To highlight the way in which body language and gesture supports oral communication.
- e. To clarify some key features of informal written communication.
- f. To provide less controlled oral practice of the present simple used to talk about future itineraries.
- g. To provide practice in scan reading.
- h. To provide practice in scan listening.

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Key Skill

Authentic texts can be used to practise a variety of reading and listening skills. In these kinds of lessons, it is a good idea to include a stage in the lesson that gets learners to reflect on the skills they have practised and think about how they can transfer these skills when reading and listening to texts outside the classroom. It is also a good idea to remember that authentic texts can provide good examples of language in real contexts.

Task 4 – An approach to planning lessons with authentic material



Letters a to g below describe a series of steps that can be followed when planning a lesson based around authentic materials. Place these steps in a logical order.

Planning Steps	Order
a. decide how you will focus on the language.	
b. create reading/listening tasks for receptive skills practice and to ensure comprehension of the task.	
c. edit the text, if necessary – this might mean cutting out some difficult vocabulary or deciding to use only part of the text.	
d. read the text carefully and decide if it is about the right language level for your learners.	
e. think of a follow-on speaking activity you could do after reading the text.	
f. read the text and decide if it will be of interest to your students.	
g. look for useful vocabulary and/or grammar that you can highlight in this text.	

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Thinking about your teaching ...

Over a period of a term, try using different kinds of authentic material. Each time you use it ask your students to evaluate the material in terms of level of difficulty and interest. Keep a record of their comments and at the end of the term, see if you can determine any patterns in their feedback.

Note your conclusions in your *Teaching Log*.

Taking it to the classroom ...

A lot of authentic material produced by teachers is based around magazine or newspaper articles. Try creating a lesson based around something very different. And remember that authentic material can include listening material.

Want to find out more ... ?

On pages 67 to 69 of *Teaching and Learning in the Language Classroom* by Tricia Hedge (Oxford University Press 2000) there is extra reading on authentic materials.

Related TaskBook lessons...

You may be interested in the following lessons in the ESOL Teaching Skills TaskBook series, relating to the use of authentic material:

- **Unit 3 a) Listening 1: Listening sub-skills and a typical lesson** (*looks at different listening sub-skills and how to practise them*)
- **Unit 3 b) Listening 2: Learner-friendly listening lessons** (*looks at how to make listening lessons more manageable for your learners*)
- **Unit 3 c) Reading 1: Knowing about strategies and sub-skills** (*provides an introduction to different reading sub-skills and strategies*)
- **Unit 3 d) Reading 2: Setting tasks for reading texts** (*looks at creating tasks to help learners develop and practice different reading sub-skills*)
- **Unit 5 c) Using Songs: Songs are a rich source of authentic material and this lesson looks at how songs can be integrated into your lessons.**

Answer Key



Task 2 – Feedback

- 1) c and e
- 2) g and a
- 3) h and d
- 4) f and b

Task 3 – Feedback

- 1) g
- 2) e
- 3) h
- 4) c
- 5) a
- 6) b
- 7) d
- 8) f

Task 4 – Feedback

- 1) f
- 2) d
- 3) g
- 4) c
- 5) b
- 6) a
- 7) e