

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 Some time-dependent resources like news stories or social media posts can quickly become outdated.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.

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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.