

CONSIDERATIONS FOR ADAPTING MATERIALS TO MEET LEARNER NEEDS

When adapting materials for language learners, teachers must consider a number of factors in order to offer an effective and relevant activity. First, teachers must think about the chosen material in relation to the target skill of the lesson, the class environment and size, the language level of learners, and the ages of the learners. Following that, teachers must look closely at the material itself in order to identify what adaptations are possible; these adaptations need to be considered in terms of the sub-skills targeted, such as vocabulary, grammatical components, structure and design, and idiomatic expressions. After considering these factors, teachers can then decide if they need to edit, add to, or cut out some of the material. Though adapting materials can seem like a difficult task, the value added to students' learning can make the entire process very worthwhile. In this week's Teacher's Corner, teachers will review the considerations necessary for adapting materials to meet learner needs.

LARGER CONSIDERATIONS

The majority of materials available for use in class can be easily adapted to fit a variety of teaching environments, but adaptation does require some time and forethought. Here are some key factors to consider as you adapt resources to best suit your goals and the needs and interests of your students.

Target Skill of the Lesson

The target skill (reading, writing, listening, or speaking) is the foundation of a language lesson. When bringing in outside materials and adapting them for a lesson, teachers must prioritize the lesson's target skills and objectives over other factors. For example, a teacher might find a wonderful material that is relevant to the lesson's theme and easily adapted for class size and environment, but the material does not fit well with the lesson's target skill. Therefore, this resource may not be the best choice. Here are questions to help consider target skills:

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- *Can the material be adapted to work with the target skill of the lesson? What kind of adaptation is needed for this material to be an effective part of the overall lesson?*
- *How much time and effort are required to adapt the material to fit the target skill of the lesson? Is that time and effort better spent on incorporating other materials?*

Class Environment and Size

The number of students in your class or your classroom context can affect a resource's impact and usefulness for your students. Consider these questions before you adapt a resource for your learners:

- *How easily can the material be adapted to fit a large or small group of learners? For example, teachers with large groups of learners (40 students or more) might avoid using a long article due to the number of copies it would require. Resources and access to copy machines and other tools might be a limiting factor for large groups.*
- *How does funding and access affect what can be adapted? Some teachers have a number of resources at their fingertips while others are working with limited resources. Again, consider a classroom with a large number of students. Is there enough money, paper, or even ink to provide this resource to a large class?*
- *What other factors in the teaching environment will contribute to the need to adapt certain materials? For example, do you have access to technology that can help you make adaptations to listening materials?*

Language Levels of Learners

Along with target skills, learners' language levels are at the core of lesson planning and design. Materials, whether adapted or used in their original format, must be evaluated in terms of learners' language levels.

Some questions for consideration include:

- *Would this material prove too difficult to adapt for the learners' language levels? For example, it may take too much time and language analysis to adapt an article from the *New York Times* to fit the language levels of beginning or intermediate learners.*

Learners' Ages

Perhaps the easiest factor to consider when adapting materials are learners' ages. Many teachers know what topics interest their learners and are age-appropriate. Here are some questions to ask when considering materials relative to learners' age levels.

- *Will the material hold an interest for the age group in question regardless of adaptations? For example, it could be a challenge to adapt a political news story to meet the interest level of younger learners. Likewise, adapting a children's book to use with adult learners could be seen as too basic or even insulting.*
- *Can the material be easily adapted to fit the interest and needs of the age group, or would an adaptation require too much research and effort?*

SMALLER CONSIDERATIONS

Vocabulary

For all materials used in the language classroom, the Lexile level, or the language level, of the material plays a critical role in whether the material is appropriate for learners. Lexile level is measured by vocabulary, the number of words, and sentence lengths; it indicates what level of learner would best be served by the material. For many beginning and intermediate learners, authentic materials without adaptations may have a Lexile level that is too advanced. There are a number of free online Lexile measurement tools that help teachers find out the language level of a text. Teachers can copy and paste or enter the text of a material into one of these measurement tools to find out the material's Lexile level. Teachers can then make adaptations to the text to match the level of their students and then use the same tool to assess the revised text. Here is a link to a free online Lexile measurement tool, but there are many more available:

- [Lexile Framework for Reading](#)

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Grammatical Components

As with vocabulary, it is very important to adapt materials in terms of a lesson's grammatical components or to meet learners' existing grammatical knowledge. Unlike with vocabulary, however, there are no easy measurement tools for determining the level of the grammatical components in a material. Thus, adapting materials based on grammar levels takes a bit more time. So, what should teachers do in order to adapt for grammatical considerations? Try the following:

- *What grammatical components are learners already familiar with?* Identify the grammatical components that learners are familiar with and have studied previously.
- *What are the targeted grammatical structures?* identify the grammar to be taught in the lesson. Materials can be adapted to teach new language aspects but can also be adapted to fit learners' levels while focusing on a different skill.
- *What aspects of this material already have the targeted grammatical structures, and what could be adapted to practice the target grammar?* A teacher can change the material to meet either or both of the above aspects. For example, teachers could look at the verb tenses in a material and change them to either reflect learners' existing knowledge or to practice the verb tense being taught.

Structure and Design

Structure and design can refer to the structure of the language in a material but this factor also refers to the layout and visual elements of the material. Many materials are designed with native English speakers in mind. For example, a material might use different fonts and colors and lay out the text in unfamiliar ways. Teachers may then want to consider adaptations that meet learners' processing skills and learning styles. For materials such as these, teachers might want consider the following questions:

- *What types of text layouts are already familiar to learners?* Lay out the text in a clear and familiar pattern so that students can easily read or follow along while listening. For example, if students usually read materials formatted in columns of text, then adapting a material to have columns of text can help students to focus on learning the language.
- *Do the font and colors need to be simplified or changed to make it easier for learners to understand the material?* Use the simplest and most accessible font styles and colors. Use only one font and choose a font that is easy for students to follow. Use black text on white paper to make the text easy to read.
- *Are there elements that are unfamiliar or distracting that need to be changed or removed?* If students do not typically see extra pictures or pop-out boxes while reading, it may be worthwhile to remove these elements to help students focus on the text.

Idiomatic Expressions

The presence of idiomatic expressions in a text can easily change the level of the material. When adapting a resource, it is important to pay attention to colloquialisms and idiomatic expressions in case these language structures need to be altered to fit learners' abilities. Use some of the following techniques when adapting for these factors.

- Skim new materials for collocations of words that might be unfamiliar to learners. Teachers may want to note if the collocations should be adapted for a different level of learner.
- Identify any phrases, idiomatic expressions, or colloquialisms that are not part of the learners' background knowledge. Change unfamiliar expressions to more learner-friendly phrases unless some of the language in these expressions is part of the target skill.

NEXT STEPS FOR ADAPTING MATERIALS

After considering all of the factors explained here, it is time to decide how to adapt and adjust the material to fit the needs of students.

- One place to start is to decide what edits should be made. For example, if verb tenses need to be changed to meet the target skill of the lesson, the teacher could then work through the material to edit each verb tense to the target verb tense. Editing can take time and require extra effort but will make the material more effective and appropriate for the learners.
- Teachers might need to delete language that distracts from the lesson's target skills or that may present a challenge for learners.
- Teachers might need to add text to a material. This adaptation often is done when vocabulary in a text needs an explanation or a definition or when learners might need background information on particular themes or topics.

During the next three weeks, revisit Teacher's Corner to see specific examples of how to adapt texts for learners.