

## Introduction

Chances are good that if you are reading this guide, you speak a language other than your mother tongue. That process of learning another language is what you are being asked to guide your students in. If you have spent any time in a foreign language classroom, you probably remember some interesting lessons and some less interesting ones. If you have left the area of your mother tongue and gone elsewhere, you probably remember a few days where you had communication successes and the ever memorable days of communication failure. This guide has been put together to help you, the teacher of a less commonly taught language (LCTL), use authentic materials in your classroom. Two questions often asked are, “What is an authentic material?” and “Why should I use it in my classroom?”

### What is an authentic material?

Nunan and Miller (1995) define authentic materials as those which were *not created or edited expressly for language learners*. This means that most everyday objects in the target language qualify as authentic materials. The following list, although not exhaustive, provides a wide sampling of authentic materials that can be used in the LCTL classroom.

#### *Day to day objects:*

- train schedules
- pictures of road signs
- business cards
- labels
- menus
- brochures
- receipts
- currency

#### *Broader:*

- music
- literature
- newspapers
- television programs
- radio broadcasts
- film
- internet websites

### Why should I use authentic materials in my classroom?

Teachers of less commonly taught languages have the advantage of generally having more motivated students who have looked beyond the field of commonly taught languages. These motivated students may enjoy the interesting facets of grammar and

vocabulary, but probably eagerly anticipate being able to communicate and interact in this new language. Teaching grammar and vocabulary in isolation may produce good readers and listeners, but without guided exposure to authentic language samples students may be less able to reach their goal of using the language.

On the level of day to day teaching, authentic materials can make individual lessons more interesting or salient. Teaching commands is a common part of language instruction and can be done straight from a grammar text. However, a more motivating, rich source of commands is also found in advertisements and instruction manuals. Using these authentic materials to teach the same point may help students remember the grammatical construction better and give them a sense of how the construct can be used in various contexts. Similarly, language classes often begin with greetings, but it may be difficult for students to grasp or remember how to greet whom as the social norms dictate. A video clip may be a helpful means of presenting these concepts and forms.

On a broader level, consistent use of authentic materials in the classroom keeps students grounded in the reality of the language, helping them to recognize that there is a community of users who live out their lives in this other language. Exposing students to authentic materials can also help them better understand the target culture and envision how they might participate in this community. For example, instead of introducing food vocabulary in the target language by providing equivalent translations in the students' native language, the teacher can instead introduce students to food vocabulary via an authentic menu, asking students to deduce the meanings of unfamiliar food items from context. Once meaning has been established, the vocabulary words can become part of a communicative exercise where students describe what is in a dish or role play a restaurant scene, requesting certain items. In this way not only do students acquire new vocabulary but they also are exposed to typical ethnic foods found on menus.

### **How do I get authentic materials?**

There are various resources available online (some on this website even). But many authentic materials can be small items that can either be mailed by friends from the language area or picked up by you the teacher as you travel. With a little forethought, this does not have to be a major expense or hassle.

### **How do I use authentic materials?**

Often times the printed book seems like an easier teaching tool than adding in authentic materials. This may not be the case. With a little practice and creativity (or idea borrowing), incorporating authentic materials into your lesson will not take you more time than lesson planning would in general. This website has an annotated bibliography that can direct you to some books and articles that can serve as a valuable source of guidance. It also contains sample lesson plans designed around a variety of authentic materials.

### **Using the lesson plans on this website**

The sample lessons on this website are intended to stimulate your thinking on using authentic materials in *your* language classroom. For each authentic material type,

you will find a cover page with an overview or rationale. Following this will be several lesson plans that use the material type in different ways. These lessons are formatted according to the *TESOL New Ways* guidelines. This includes a helpful caveat and options section at the end of each lesson to help you think about how to modify the sample lesson to fit your needs. Additionally, some lesson plans include sample worksheets. These may be helpful for seeing different ideas for creating worksheets to guide student activities. A certain amount of planning will still be necessary on your part in order to adapt them for your use. For example, you will note that the lesson plans are not written with any specific LCTL in mind. This means that in adapting the lesson, you will need to locate appropriate materials in your LCTL and make adjustments in the lesson procedures based on factors such as the proficiency level of your learners, their needs and interests, etc. With that caveat in mind, we sincerely hope that the lesson plans on this website will help you arrive at new and innovative ways to use authentic materials and make your teaching more enjoyable. Best of luck!

*If you would find it helpful to print this guide out in its entirety, a copy is available in [pdf format](#).*