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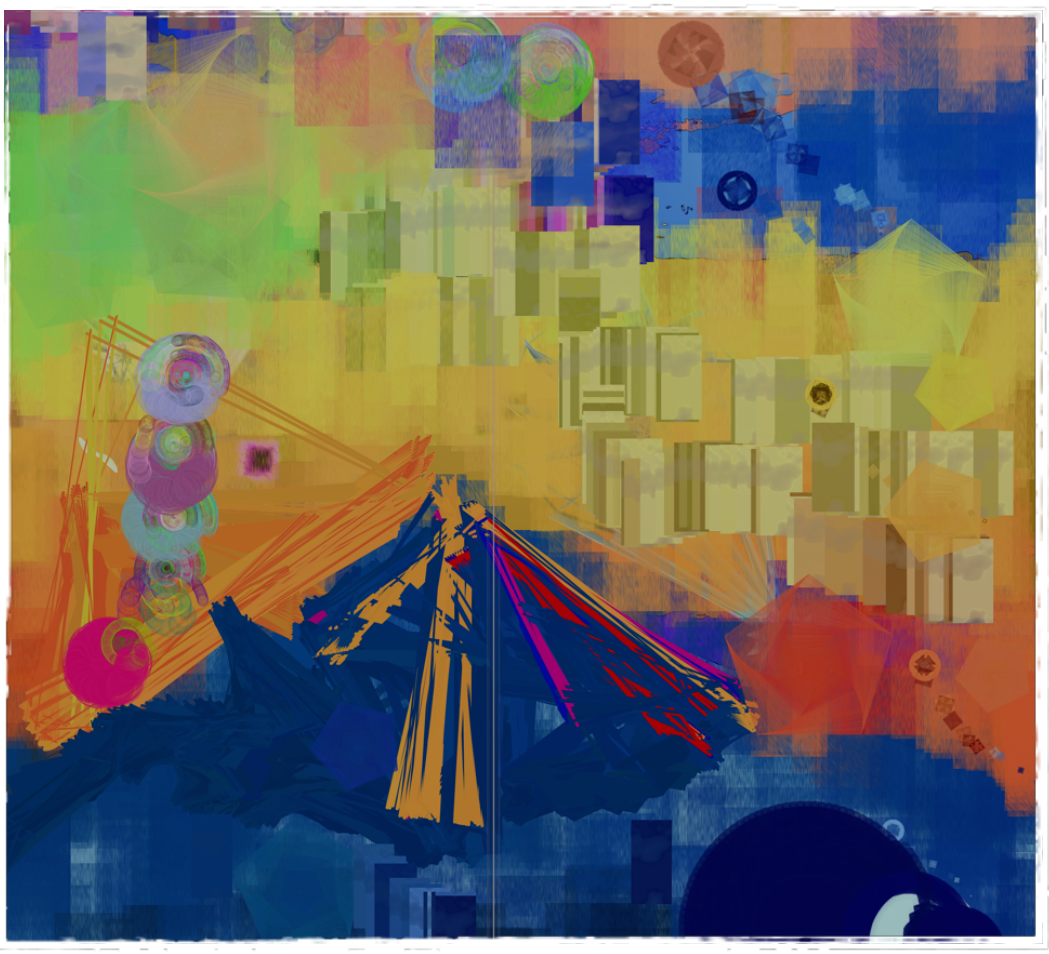

A publication of the JALT Materials Writers Special Interest Group

The Materials Writers SIG was established for the purpose of helping members to turn fresh teaching ideas into useful classroom materials. We try to be a mutual assistance network, offering information regarding copyright law, sharing practical advice on publishing practices, including self-publication, and suggesting ways to create better language learning materials for general consumption or for individual classroom use.

WWW.MATERIALSWRITERS.ORG

JALT
THE JAPAN ASSOCIATION FOR LANGUAGE TEACHING
全国語学教育学会

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From the Publication Chair

Kaunapawa Nangula

Welcome to the Spring 2018 issue of Between the Keys. I hope the new academic year has started off on a good note. Even if hasn't, remember that it is never too late to turn it around into your best year yet.

We're featuring three Columns in this issue. The first is by Greg Goodmacher who provides us with six practical suggestions on adapting songs for the classroom. These target not only listening, but also other aspects of language learning, such as vocabulary, content, and grammar. Greg also informs us of an upcoming JALT talk about using songs to discuss global issues.

In our second Column, Travis Holtzclaw interviews Chris Elvin, a materials writer, on his experience with developing materials and having them published. Chris also shares his thoughts on what constitutes effective materials in general, as well as those effective for high school and university settings.

In our third Column, Brian Cullen discusses content and language integrated learning (CLIL), also known as content-based instruction (CBI), and its importance in our globalized world. Brian also includes an interview with Keith Kelly, a CLIL-focused materials writer, who shares his experience in creating content focused materials and provides us with ways we can integrate such content into our materials and teaching.

In one of our two Feature Articles, Gregory Strong, a graded reader writer, explains four principles of writing fiction graded readers, accompanied by practical examples of each principle in action. He also outlines some steps for those interested in venturing into graded reader authorship or for those are already part of the graded reader writing clan but desiring to take their work to the next level. In our second Feature Article, Stephen Paton, who recently wrote and self-published a textbook, offers us practical advice on overcoming the hurdles that come with such an endeavor.

We hope you can draw inspiration from these resources and that they will encourage you to continue developing engaging materials for your class. We look forward to receiving your contributions to share with our Materials Writers Special Interest Group for our forthcoming issues.

From the Program Chair

Lindsay Wells

We have a few exciting events planned for the SIG. First, is our forum at PanSIG 2018:

Innovations in Materials Design

May 19 (Saturday) 14:30-15:55 Room 4502

Brian Cullen is currently revising a textbook that was first published in 2001 and then a second edition in 2003. This will be the third edition. Because it is such a long gap, there are some interesting differences between the second and third editions. Some of these differences are: content, graphics and design style, exercises, and the use of technology.

Steve Paton will discuss how the 'innovation' is in the easiness with which he managed to produce a physical textbook for his students, and how easy it is now to use one's own computer using easy day-to-day software.

Todd Beukens will talk about basic digital tools that content creators can use to enhance their products and connect with their audience. Most of these tools are free or very affordable, and make connecting with viewers a breeze. More specifically, this presentation will look at following four things: 1) how to create a product platform, 2) how to augment printed works with digital activities, 3) how to build and maintain a following and increase exposure, and 4) how to self-promote products both synchronously and asynchronously.

Second is our annual SIG Forum at the JALT International Conference:

JALT 2018 SIG Forum: Diversity and Inclusion in Teaching Materials

Date (TBA), Location (TBA)

Diversity is becoming an increasingly important issue in today's society. It is therefore in our students' best interest for us to include a wider range of voices in our teaching materials. In this interactive forum hosted by the Materials Writers SIG, a panel of writers will share how they incorporate diverse voices and related topics into the teaching materials that they create. Both theoretical approaches and practical considerations will be discussed.

We hope you will join us for an interesting and lively forum. Panelists will include Marcus Grandon, Marc Helgesen, Gregg McNabb, Diane Nagatomo, Frances Shinkai, and Cameron Romney. This is a a great opportunity to discuss various issues and share ideas, so we look forward to seeing many of you there.

The Materials Adaptation Column
Adapting Songs for English Education

Greg Goodmacher

Sharing ideas regarding the adaptation of teaching materials is the purpose of this column. Each column consists of five or more examples of ways to revise educational texts or to create teaching materials with newspapers, videos, photographs, advertisements, college catalogs, or other authentic materials (there is no limit as to what we can use as teaching tools). These columns are practical guides. They are not meant to be research papers. This time the focus is on using English songs for developing various language skills.

Do not expect the ideas and examples given below to meet the needs of every group of students. As a teacher and materials creator, you should analyze each activity described in this column and adapt each one to fit the specific needs of your students. Most teachers use songs for listening practice only, but teachers can use them to practice all language skills and to teach grammar and various content.

Ways to Utilize Songs

Suggestion One: Students Creating Songs With Familiar Melodies

Many years ago, I had to use a section of a conversation book that my students and I found boring. The topic and vocabulary were cooking related. To increase enthusiasm and to facilitate a multidimensional experience with the material, I turned the section on recipes into song singing and writing experiences. Hopefully, readers of this column are familiar with the old children's song titled "Row, Row, Row Your Boat Gently down the Stream." I took the vocabulary from the textbook pages and created a version of that song. My adapted song is below:

Chop, chop, chop your onions
Finely on the cutting board
Fry, fry, fry the onions
Deliciously on the frying pan
Mix, mix, mix the eggs
Quickly in the bowl
Pour, pour, pour the eggs
Slowly in the pan
Shape, shape, shape the omelet
Nicely in the pan
Grind, grind, grind the pepper
Coarsely over the omelet
Place, place, place the omelet
Delicately on the plates
Call, call, call your friends
Happily to your table

The students and I sang the song together, and we also mimed the actions expressed by the verbs. Following that, I put students into small groups, and assigned them to create a recipe that they could sing with other students. The students could choose any melody. Before the

next class, they were to make copies of their songs. During the following class, the groups distributed the lyrics, taught necessary vocabulary, and led the class in singing their songs. Most students adapted recipes to the melodies of Japanese children's songs, for instance, "Mori no Kuma San."

Notes: Most of the students were high-level college students who were studying to be English teachers. I wrote about this exercise in an article, titled "Using Multidimensional Activities to Improve Textbooks." You can find the entire article in the JALT 2003 Conference Proceedings.

Suggestion Two: Music Videos for Teaching Content and Vocabulary

Most educators will agree with the well-known expression: "A picture is worth a thousand words," Lessons that include both eye-catching, affectively powerful images with stimulating music are sure to keep students awake and focused. Images in music videos can assist students to comprehend and remember vocabulary.

For many years, I have been teaching an environmental issues-content based EFL course at several colleges. To introduce students to class content and to teach new vocabulary for that course, the lesson on the first day always incorporates an online music video for "Hey You" by Madonna. The lesson I created teaches vocabulary that are not in the lyrics. Instead, the activity focuses on vocabulary that is necessary to speak about the visual content of the music video.

The music video shows scenes of deforestation, hunting, endangered animals, air pollution, water pollution, nuclear power plants, starvation, people climbing over border walls, climate change, and other global problems. The video also shows ordinary people and national leaders from around the world. In addition to problems, the video shows renewable energy, people helping other, and other solutions to problems.

Before I show the video, students read the following questions:

What global problems did you see in this video?
What solutions did you see for global problems?
Which famous people did you recognize?
Which countries or continents did you see in the video?
What was the purpose of the video?
What is your opinion of the music?

I play the video several times while observing the students' progress. Between each showing, I allow students in small groups to show their papers to each other. They get a few minutes to share what they wrote. Students teach other words that they do not know.

The last time that I play the video, I pause at important points and elicit vocabulary that matches the scene. For example, I might pause at an image of a woman holding a starving baby. One student might say "poverty," but another might say "starvation." I listen and write the words on the board. Then I briefly explain the meanings of the words and the connection between the concepts expressed in those words. If no students can answer, I introduce the word and write it on the board.

At the end of the lesson, I tell the students that we will be studying the topics that the video touched upon and that they need to remember the vocabulary that we covered.

On the backside of the handout, I have the actual lyrics, which are very simple and repetitive. If we have time, we listen again while reading the lyrics. The handout also includes the URL for the music video. I encourage students to watch again at home and to repeat aloud the new words as they see representative images.

The internet has a tremendous variety of music videos. Within a reasonable amount of time, a teacher who is efficient at searching the web can find music videos that match almost any content.

Note: If you are interested in using music for teaching culture, I suggest that you read Susan Sullivan's article: "The World through Music: Using World Music in a Comparative Course." You can find this article in the April 2014 JALT Global Issues in Language Education Newsletter.

Suggestion Three: Musical Chairs With Song Vocabulary

Most of us have probably played musical chairs when we were children. This game is useful for vocabulary listening practice. It is especially useful as a warm-up activity or a way to relax students after a tough examination. Arrange classroom chairs in a wide ring. The number of chairs is one less than the number of students who stand in front of the chairs. Play the music. Students walk in a circle in front of the chairs and try to sit in an empty chair when the music stops. The walkers wait for the music to stop and run to a chair. The remaining standing student is out of the game. Remove one chair each time one student leaves the circle. The game continues until only one student remains. That is the traditional version of the game.

To adapt the song so that students must pay attention to specific vocabulary, I tell the students that they must sit when they hear certain words; I teach the meanings of unknown words. Then I write one of those words on the board and tell students to sit when they hear that word in the song. I do not stop the music immediately after I hear the word because that would be too obvious. Most students usually hear the word and rush to the chairs. A few students hurry to sit because they notice the other students starting to sit. I give a handout of the lyrics to the students who are left out so that they can listen while others play. We continue until either one student is left or I make a decision to stop the game if the students who are not in the game seem to feel left out. This game is originally a children's game, but my college students have enjoyed playing the game. It works very well with Xmas parties or other special occasions.

Suggestion Four: The Standard Fill in the Blank Listening Exercise

The most common adaptation of a song for English teaching is the cloze procedure. Words are removed from lines within lyrics and replaced with blank lines. Students write words in the blanks. Students can do this either as a listening activity, reading activity, or a combination of reading and listening. I sometimes have students first do it as a reading exercise and then listen to check their answers. To see an example of such an activity, examine the following two lines from "Top of the World" by the Carpenters.

I'm on the top of the world lookin' _____ on creation

And the only explanation I can _____

Changing the level of cloze exercises does not take much work. Teachers can leave letters at the front and the back of each word to make the exercise simpler, or teachers can increase the intervals of blanks to raise the difficulty level. See the two examples below.

Simpler
I'm on the top of the world lookin' d_____n on creation
And the only explanation I can f_____d

More Difficult
I'm on _____ top of _____ world lookin' _____ on creation
_____ the only _____I can find

Suggestion Five: Replacing Words or Phrases of Lyrics

Teachers can replace words in lyrics with similar words. I usually use words that could logically and grammatically be a replacement for the song writer's choice, but I sometimes add a twist to make the exercise more amusing for the students. The twist could be an incongruous idea, a name of a student or teacher, or a reference to our class. Teachers give their adapted song lyrics to students, who listen and write the correct words or phrases above the incorrect ones. Afterward, the teacher elicits the answers and writes them on the board. Finally, students sing the song together.

Compare the original lines from The Beatles' "Black Bird" to the adapted version.

Original
Blackbird singing in the dead of night
Take these broken wings and learn to fly
All your life
You were only waiting for this moment to arise
Blackbird singing in the dead of night
Take these sunken eyes and learn to see
All your life
You were only waiting for this moment to be free

Revised
Black cat singing in the dead of night
Take these broken eyes and learn to cry
All your life
You were only waiting for this minute to arise
Black bat singing in the dead of night
Take these sunken pies and learn to swallow
All your life
You were only waiting for this class to end to be free

Suggestion Six: Grammar Practice with Music

Teachers can use music to introduce or to review grammar points, too. A conversation textbook that I recently used covered "used to," "use to," and "didn't use to" in a manner that bored me and seemed to bore my students. So, I livened up that section by adding a song and following that up with an activity that is similar to a jazz chant.

The song that I used is "I Need You" by America. It is a song about the end of a romantic relationship. My first step was to create a simple cloze exercise for the entire song. Then I asked open-ended comprehension questions such as these: What happened to the

people in the song? Why did they use to laugh and cry? Does the singer laugh much now? Why or why or why not? Do you think the singer cries much now? Why or why not?

The first five lines (unrevised) of the song are below:

We used to laugh, we used to cry
We used to bow our heads then, wonder why
And now you're gone, I guess I'll carry on
And make the best of what you've left to me
Left to me, left to me

I followed the cloze activity with an exercise that is similar to a jazz chant. The chanting activity allowed students to communicate about themselves.

To do this, I showed students a short Powerpoint of photographs of myself at different points of my life: when I was a child, a teenager, a long-haired college student, and so on. I talked briefly about each photograph, saying sentences like "I used to steal candy, but I don't now," or "I used to be shy around girls, but I am not shy anymore," or "My hair used to reach below my shoulders, but it is short now." I repeated these sentences in the rhythm of a jazz chant. And I told students that they would soon similarly talk about themselves.

Students were then required to write at least five sentences that express how they have changed at various times in their lives. In small groups, they took turns chanting their sentences. Following that, students discussed how their bodies, habits, preferences, etc. have changed.

Due to a lack of time and space, this BTK column explained just six ways of adapting songs for English education. However, there are many more. If you have ideas to share, please share them with other teachers. Exchanging ideas is one of the main goals of the Materials Writers Special Interest Group.

To learn more about using music for teaching global issues related EFL course, you should attend Louise Haynes' keynote speech at the 2018 JALT conference. Her talk is titled "Student Choice and Songs of Social Significance."

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Biographical Information

Greg Goodmacher is the author of Stimulating Conversations Today, This is Culture, Cultural Issues ⇔Environmental Issues, Multicultural Perspectives, and Nature and the Environment. His research interests include materials design, global issues content-based language instruction, and tourism.

Local Notes: Interview with Chris Elvin

Travis Holtzclaw

Welcome to our fourth installment of Local Notes. For this issue, we interview Chris Elvin, a Tokyo-based teacher and materials developer. Chris teaches at several prestigious universities, including Aoyama University, Rikkyo University, and Shirayuri Women's University. In this interview, he discusses how he turned his classroom activities into a long-selling textbook and also shares tips on how to create quality materials that encourage student engagement in the classroom.

The following are excerpts from the interview:

MW SIG: How did you get involved in writing and publishing books for Japanese learners of English?

Elvin: I think I fell into writing materials. My first job in Japan apart from conversation class in the evenings was at a private girls' high school with almost fifty students per class. I could hardly understand a word of Japanese and the lessons were out of control. I didn't know what to do to get order so one night I wrote the lyrics of a popular English song by hand, blanked a few words out and distributed them to the class. They were flabbergasted that it was handwritten, but once I played the song, everyone calmed down and got on with the task.

What I learned from that is that next time I should use a word processor, and if you have good materials the students will enjoy and learn from them. This was probably the beginning of the eternal cycle of piloting and improving my teaching materials. It's something I enjoy doing so it was easy to continue.

As for publishing, I don't quite remember. I was studying for my Master's at Temple and incorporating what I was learning into my materials, so after a while I must have built up quite a portfolio. It's not that I wrote a book; It's more that I had a selection of activities which worked quite well in class, and slowly they took the form of a book. I met Dave Martin at a JALT conference and he encouraged me to send him my work. Fortunately, he liked what I sent him and we decided to publish.

MW SIG: We often hear how quality and attractive materials help create a better classroom experience for the learners. Could you share with us a few of your tips or guidelines you use for creating such materials?

Elvin: Ideally, teaching materials should be self-explanatory and not need much explanation nor intervention. Of course, a teacher's job is to teach, but there should also be times when she can sit back, observe, and reflect, and well-designed materials allow her to do this. First and foremost, the topics should be of interest to the students, so the better she knows her students, the easier the task of creating such materials can be. Secondly, the workflow should be organized to maximize learning and minimize problems.

For example, if your students are studying current events, news articles and vocabulary could be presented first. After that, they could practice using the newly acquired language in pairs or groups. Then perhaps they could have the chance to personalize what they have learned by asking their own questions to their partner, group or class, and finally there could be an extension activity requiring research, which would lead to a discussion activity, presentation, or a written homework assignment. Review activities are also important, not just to check the students' learning, but also for effective time management. Put that all together, and I think I have just described a typical EFL textbook, so sorry for being so boring!

MW SIG: What types of English language learning materials do you think are most needed by Japanese learners of English?

Elvin: If I were still at the high school, I would say activities which are grammar focused because they need the opportunity to practice what they are learning in their regular English classes. At university, it is quite different. The students already know the grammar, so I think the focus should be on the creating stimulating and enjoyable activities. Not everybody likes English, but if the activity is challenging and fun, they will enjoy the task. I also encourage my students to think critically and express their opinions regardless of the course that I am teaching.

MW SIG: Your book *Now you're talking!* (EFL Press) has been on the market here in Japan for quite some time now. What was the guiding philosophy behind that book and how has it been received?

Elvin: As I have previously mentioned, it was just a case of building up a portfolio of activities which were successful in class and were piloted and improved on over time. The students level dictated what I was limited to, and how they reacted to them helped me to decide what to keep and what to change. As to how the book was received, I think it is a very minor contribution to EFL publishing in Japan, but it has been on the market for twenty years now and not fallen off the radar yet.

Note - Chris Elvin has been kind enough to offer many of his materials to our members free of charge. To see what he's made available, please visit his website at <http://www.eflclub. com/elvin.html>.

Biographical Information

Travis Holtzclaw teaches at Meiho Junior and Senior High School in western Tokyo, specializing in conversational English and speaking skills. Two years ago (and after many attempts at getting into the industry), he became a published author and now, through the Local Notes: Interview with ... column, he hopes to provide fellow JALT and MW SIG members with some insights into publishing for the Japanese market.

Writer's Point
CLIL and the use of Content as a Context for Language Teaching

Brian Cullen (Nagoya Institute of Technology)

Most teachers and materials writers are probably already aware of the CLIL movement (Content and Language Integrated Learning). Years ago, we used to use the name Content-Based Instruction (CBI) for a similar approach that blends content and language learning. The term CBI seems to be more common in the United States whereas CLIL is more of a European term. However, whatever we call it, the use of content to teach language is clearly back in vogue, and for material writers that opens up many possibilities and challenges.

What is CLIL and why is it important?

The MacMillan CLIL website (http://www.onestopenglish.com/clil/) offers the following definition: "CLIL stands for Content and Language Integrated Learning and refers to teaching subjects such as science, history and geography to students through a foreign language." Ardiansyah (2015) discusses how CLIL was partially shaped by the need for immersion education programs and schools to integrate students whose native language was not English.

While some educators believe that content makes language learning more complicated, advocates of CLIL counter that it makes language learning more authentic and engaging. They suggest that people learn a second or foreign language more successfully when they use the language as a means of understanding content, rather than as an end in itself. CLIL reflects learners' needs for learning a second language, and well-designed content can provide the basis for activating both the cognitive and the interactional processes that are the starting point for second language learning. Proponents of CLIL will probably agree with the words of Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835): 'We cannot teach a language; we can only create the conditions under which it will be learned' (cited in Dakin, 1973, p. 11).

David Marsh, a leading expert in CLIL, argues that it leads to "positive attitude changes in learners towards learning a language, and towards themselves as language learners." He suggests that it is beneficial because of "the ways in which CLIL connects them to their own 'worlds' using multi-mode technology; and the impact on the brain when language learning becomes 'acquisitional', and not just 'intentional'." Another important driving force for the rising popularity of CLIL is globalization and the fact that the modern international workforce is likely to process their work challenges and carry out their tasks through English. Marsh notes that CLIL "is no longer an idea, a fashion, it is a reality. The socio-economic drivers are very strong."

A CLIL-focused material writer

Recently, I had the opportunity to interview the materials writer, Keith Kelly, and he provides us with a good example of how teachers can effectively bring content into their teaching and materials. Keith started off his language teaching career with French and German before moving into ESL teaching.

Keith's interest in using content as a context for teaching language began with his involvement in the Science Across the World programme (www.scienceacross.org). This programme began when a group of scientists reached the decision that better 'communication' is needed in the field of science and began a project with a mission described as: "Science Across the World brings an international dimension to science education in schools and colleges. Students gain a global perspective on scientific issues related to their personal lives, their impacts on the environment and the varying cultural impacts of science on people in different countries." Keith was asked to help these scientists to develop language within their schools' exchange programme of science investigations. At the same time, he was teaching English at a Bulgarian grammar school, and also managing a project for the British Council (The English Across the Curriculum Project) which had him supporting the work of content teachers teaching their subjects through foreign languages, mainly English. All of these factors made him realize the importance of content and led him to CLIL.

Soon, he found himself co-teaching with geographers, historians, and scientists. Using only a small budget, he had to set up workshops for materials writing, and identify resources for their work and others. They began a series of summer school writing workshops for teachers in Bulgaria which lasted 4 years and produced two publications called Factworld (links are included in the Resources section at the end of this article). Factworld and the other links are well worth checking out as they are written in a practical and engaging style and provide good examples of CLIL in action. They are also designed with consideration for the practical realities and difficulties of real-world teaching, including, for example, an "international hot chocolate recipe for teachers" and the tequila recipe/activity for tired teachers given below:

Ingredients: 1 lemon slice, salt, 1 shot Tequila
TASK: Arrange the actions in logical order:

- Sit back and enjoy.
- Lick salt, down tequila & bite the lemon all in quick succession.
- Sprinkle salt onto back of hand.
- Lick back of hand.

As well as linking content to language learning, the activities in these resources also aim to link classrooms with other classrooms around the world. This international linking of groups of students is a good example of bringing authentic communication into and beyond the classroom and has been at the heart of much of the work Keith has done.

He has written CLIL materials for several publishers, most significantly with Macmillan on their "Your CLIL" section of onestopenglish.com. These include a collection of reference phrase lists of academic language for geography, biology, chemistry and physics, and are accompanied by lesson plans and resources aimed at activating this language. With Macmillan, he has also published two self-study resources in the Vocabulary Practice Series for Science and Geography. He also manages a CLIL version of http://www.tigtagworld.com/

and produced http://www.tigtagworld.com/clil, which won the 2017 ELTons award for innovation in teacher resources.

What is challenging about writing CLIL materials?

As a language specialist, Keith admits that he is often out of his depth with the many subject areas that he deals with. This is a challenge, but not one which is impossible to overcome. He sees a positive side in this too, saying that "being humble about not knowing something creates a level playing field with students and once they know you aren't an 'expert', the teaching and learning can actually be more meaningful as you are discovering along with the students." It has also given him the opportunity to meet and work with some amazing people, such as Dr. Lida Schoen, a chemistry educator from Holland with whom he created Young Ambassadors for Chemistry (https://www.factworld.info/en/YACs-Young-Ambassadors-of-Chemistry) and took a roadshow of workshops around the world. These workshops raised awareness of chemistry in people's lives and got kids building models of DNA from sweets and extracting DNA from kiwi fruit. These workshops were carried out in public places to get people excited about science and much more. For Keith, language teaching has become all about finding other things to do in that language.

Keith is clearly passionate about CLIL, so five years ago when he opened his own school (Anglia School www.anglia-school.info) in his adopted hometown of Plovdiv, Bulgaria, he knew it had to be a CLIL school. On the school's website and Facebook page, the photographs make it immediately evident that the children, teens, and adults at the school are all learning English by doing something else.

Recent project

In a recent materials writing project, Keith was approached by the producers of the award winning documentary 'Trashed' narrated by Jeremy Irons. Initially they wanted to write a book of materials for teachers, but he suggested that it would be more beneficial to create a platform for schools to study using the film to have students communicate with each other by sharing their investigations into trash and waste.

Trashed World (www.trashedworld.com) was the product of 18 months of work and has grown rapidly to the point that there are now almost 400 schools registered all over the world. The project gets young people to watch meaningful chunks of the movie, do classroom-based activities such as survey their group about 'a week of waste', find partners, and share their results. In doing so, they see how things are done, better or worse, in other places.

Conclusion

CLIL is rising in popularity worldwide because of globalization and the need for more authentic communication, and also because the use of content in language learning can create better student engagement. This resurgent interest in linking content to language learning provides both new challenges and new opportunities for material writers. In this era of globalization, it is certainly a concept that seems to have finally found its time to blossom. Keith finished our interview by saying: "Frankly, learning language for language sake is an outdated concept. Today, young people learn best because of 'what' they are doing, not the medium through which they are learning it. Finding ways to put foreign language learning in a meaningful context is the key. Young people in many places now do

not see English as a subject, but as a life skill, and they need to be doing stuff with this language rather than learning about it."

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Resources

Factworld Publications

https://www.factworld.info/cache/files/161.pdf
https://www.factworld.info/cache/files/162.pdf

MacMillan Self-Resource Materials

https://www.factworld.info/cache/files/159.pdf
https://www.factworld.info/cache/files/160.pdf

More of Keith's resources and publications can be found at:
https://www.factworld.info/en/Publications

Biographical Information

Dr. Brian Cullen is an associate professor at Nagoya Institute of Technology. He is written or edited over 30 textbooks. His current research interests include active learning and positive psychology.

Some Principles in Writing Fiction in Graded Readers

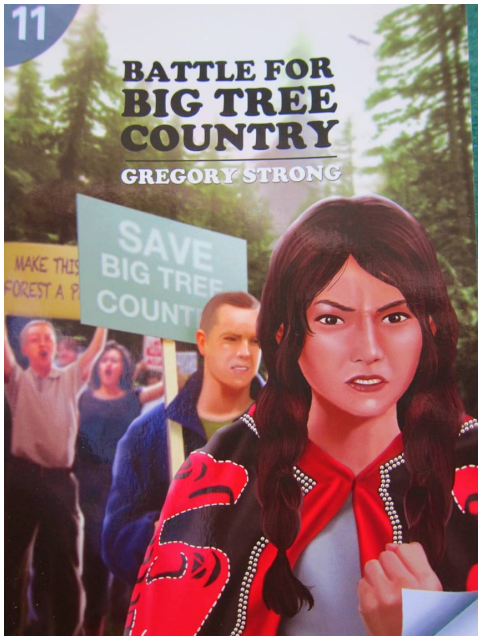
Gregory Strong (Aoyama Gakuin University)

My experience of writing graded readers in the fictional genre is that they are like very, very short novels of story-length, with a hook, a major conflict with an arc of development, and a resolution. For this piece, I will concentrate on four principles in writing them – starting the story in *media res* or the middle of the action, developing and maintaining conflicts, charting the action through scenes, and exploring the genre of graded readers.

"Always start writing as late in a story as you possibly can," observed screenwriter William Golding. Other writers have this position, too, because much of a story is exposition and scene-setting through description. Starting a graded reader late in the action when the conflict is already developed helps excite readers about the story. Background information about the characters and their environment can be fed into the narration later. Homer's *Iliad*, the 8th century epic poem about the 10-year siege of Troy provides one of the best-known examples. That story begins in the last few weeks of the 10th and final year of the conflict.

In writing my first graded reader, *Battle for Big Tree Country*, I told the story of a young aboriginal woman fighting to save an old growth forest from logging. I had grown up on the Canadian West Coast, and had been involved in environmental protests, and this area of the world had not been written about in graded readers. I could have described the main character, Gail Klutesi, of the Nuu-chah-nulth band, and life on the edge of a temperate rain forest. But I wanted to catch the reader's interest by introducing the character in action. In my experience, environmental conflicts often played out on logging roads with the police intervening to prevent violence and to uphold the law which usually meant arresting protestors, so, I started the story there.

> Twenty-two of us – some from our tribe, as well as our friends and supporters from the town of Johnson Bay – formed a line blocking the logging road. That was the only way to save some of the oldest and tallest trees in the world. They grew in a valley that we called "Big Tree Country."



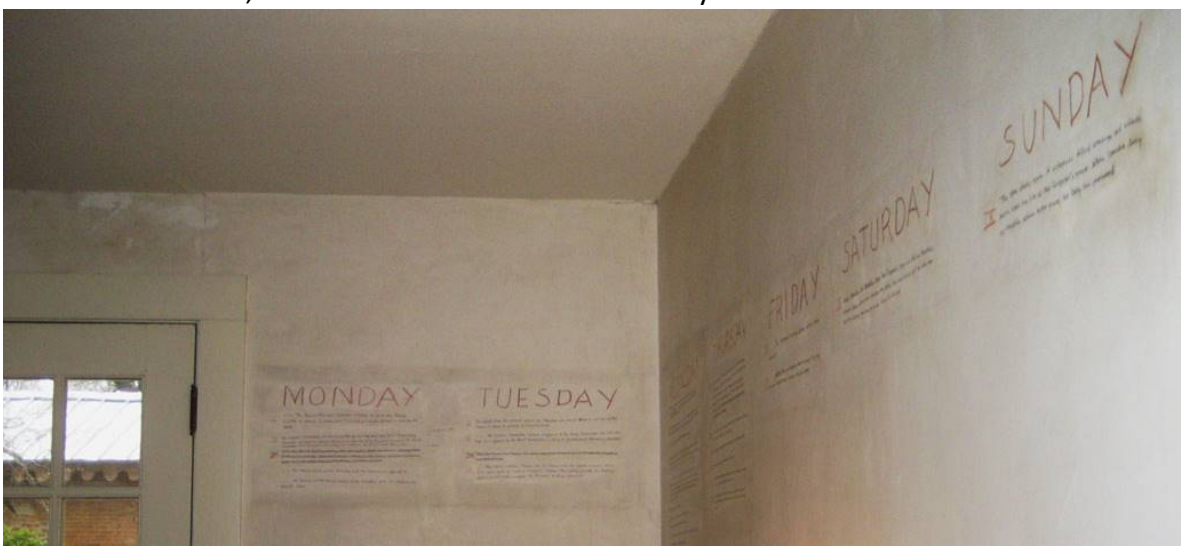
Battle for Big Tree Country

In order to get the book contract, I had also had to create a gripping story with suspense about its outcome. Cengage Learning had held an open competition for proposals and my sample three chapters and plot summary had to be original and compelling enough to get the commission.

A second very important writing principle is to develop a variety of conflicts to keep your reader's interest. In the case of *Battle for Big Tree Country*, I intensified the protesters' and the loggers' conflict by mirroring that struggle on a personal level. Gail's father, estranged from the family, was a logger. A broken family and a battle over a forest were two big conflicts that would carry the book. Gail protected "Magic," one of the oldest trees in the forest defying the loggers to cut the tree down while she was living in it, high on a tree sit, a wooden platform high in its branches. I knew something about this, having read accounts like *The Legacy of Luna*, by Julia Butterfly Hill, who saved "Luna," a thousand-year-old redwood, and a stand of ancient trees nearby through spending two years in a tree sit. Gail's tree sit also introduced a whole new series of minor conflicts, some chapter-length. These conflicts included Gail surviving a dangerous storm or saving a black bear which had wandered into the area and was going to be shot by the loggers. In the latter case, I drew on my experience as teenager seeing a bear shot in the backyard of our family home. At the time, I had naively thought the bear would be tranquilized and moved away to a forest and then it was hit by bullets and horrifyingly moaning in pain as it lay dying. Later, that scene led to some criticism from my British editors who challenged its credibility. However, I had written from experience, and ultimately *Battle for Big Tree Country* won the Extensive Reading Foundation 2016 Upper Intermediate book award.

A third principle in writing graded readers lies in the writer plotting them carefully. Again, a writer's first impulse is to describe places and people. I followed that impulse, too, until I learned that structuring events proves more important. Charles Dickens' novels are a case in point because they were first serialized as chapters in magazines and only published as books later. Therefore, each chapter has its conflicts: some conflicts are resolved within the chapter or the next; others, usually larger ones, are only resolved later by the author, the biggest ones at the end of the book.

Some years ago, I came across a wonderful example of an author plotting a novel when I visited William Faulkner's home in Rowan Oak, Oxford, Mississippi. You walked into one room and saw the planning for his novel, *A Fable*, which he had sketched as a timeline of events and actions on posters stuck on the room's white walls. Faulkner hardly plots his novels like Dickens, but the wall showed how seriously he too structured his work.



Faulkner's Walls showing events in A Fable

Creating structure is challenging because it requires a type of thinking rather than descriptive writing, but a number of strategies can help. One very simple approach is to

create evocative chapter titles, note the events that occur in them, then try to move them around to intensify the conflicts. One can also harness Aristotle's classic unities for drama: one place, one time, and one action. Dickens employs this structure in *A Christmas Carol*, where Ebenezer Scrooge living in London only has one night to repent of his present life.

By the time I wrote my fourth graded reader, I applied the three principles I have described. A publishing rep at Macmillan Language House told me of a new graded reader series, so I prepared a synopsis, a character list, and a very detailed plot summary for an advanced level reader. However, the publisher suddenly cut the number of books in the series and now only needed a low-level reader with a very reduced vocabulary. In a final blow, the story had to be about homestays in America. First, I thought of quitting the whole project. But these writing opportunities are hard to find and I consider myself a professional, so I took up the challenge of writing a simple adult story that avoided patronizing the reader. For example, the story could have had examples of comic but clichéd episodes where Mai might have had trouble learning to wear her shoes in the homestay mother's house or struggling to politely refuse the larger portions she was offered at meals. These predictable conflicts would not be very serious ones, either.

I had spent about six months living in NYC, so I set the story there, and threw some complications at my main character, Mai Kojima, 19. Her troubles began as soon as she arrived at JFK airport when her host family, a single mom and her baby, arrived late and someone tried to hustle her into paying for a private cab. I had been through JFK and heard of this hustle before. Finally, her class visited the 9/11 Memorial and Museum, again, I drew on my experiences here, and this shocking visit triggered an association for her of the atom bomb museum in Hiroshima.

Homestay in the USA

A fourth tip in writing graded readers is to explore the genre by reading widely in it. Among the attractions of graded readers are that even the longest ones can be read in a few hours. Some graded readers adapt classics such as James Hilton's *Lost Horizon* and therefore not only introduce you to a book you may wish to read later, but also suggest new narrative forms. Hilton's novel is a frame story in which a dinner conversation turns to an account of a mysterious British diplomat, Hugh Conway. He has disappeared, but left a manuscript describing his discovery of a paradise, Shangrila, hidden in the Tibetan Himalayas. Another graded reader, Bette Green's *Summer of My German Soldier* takes up the very serious themes of race and morality. The book is set in the South during WWII and the narrator, Patty, a Jewish girl, falls in love with Anton, a German P.O.W. working in a camp nearby. Her parents hate the idea and Ruth Hughes, the only character sympathetic toward Patty, is the family's African-American maid.

Novellas can help graded reader writers, too, as this genre is longer and more developed than a story but is distinct from a novel. Its narrower focus describes a central action, incident, and a character instead of the larger groups of characters and events in a novel. Stephen King's story collection, *Different Seasons,* offers two excellent examples.

"The Body" is a frame story told by a first-person narrator, an adult remembering a boyhood adventure where he and three friends found the body of a boy killed by a train. This coming-of-age novella about friends on a quest became the film, *Stand by Me.* A second novella, "Rita Hayworth and the Shawshank Redemption," supplied the plot for the film classic, *The Shawshank Redemption*. Another first-person narrator, Red, a prison inmate, describes his friend, Andy Dufresne, who not only keeps his integrity in the violent, corrupt Shawshank Prison, but eventually outwits the authorities and escapes.

Applying the four principles discussed in this article to writing a graded reader can provide anyone interested in writing fiction with valuable experiences. Then research in finding publishing companies that produce graded readers, preparing query letters, plot outlines, and sample chapters, and mailing these out is the next step. In terms of my writing, I hope to keep learning through writing short fiction and graded readers, and graduate to writing longer, more complex fiction for a novel in the young adult market.

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Biographical Information

Gregory Strong is a professor and language program coordinator in the English Department at Aoyama Gakuin University, Tokyo. He has worked in Japan, China, and Canada. Among his publications are graded readers, chapters, including *TESOL Voices: Insider Accounts of Classroom Life* (2017), a biography, *Flying Colours: The Toni Onley Story* (Harbour Press, 2002), and editing, *Adult Language Learners: Context and Innovation* (TESOL, 2009). His personal website can be found at <http://gregorystrong.com>.

Self-publishing a textbook: reflections and advice

Stephen Paton (Fukuoka University)

Not all universities allow teachers to even choose a textbook, let alone create one which they can sell to students through the bookstore. When I started at my current university, which allows such an arrangement, a few colleagues impressed upon me what a great privilege and opportunity it is, and how much they enjoyed teaching their own material exclusively rather than navigating a commercial textbook designed to appeal broadly to popular tastes. They explained how surprisingly easy it is to arrange with a book-binding company to produce professional-looking textbooks from a simple PDF file - no publishing company required. So, back in November 2016 I went out on a limb and entered into my syllabus that the textbook for my speaking classes in 2017 would be one that I had written. That is to say; one that I would have, by April, written. All it was in November was an idea with a title. An enormous amount of work lay ahead of me, and I knew it. Kind of.

To say I learned a lot throughout the process of creating my textbook would be a ridiculous understatement, and I am compelled to share the advice that I feel I am now in a position to give to anyone who might be contemplating doing the same. Some things that I did, and some approaches that I took, were right. Thankfully, I anticipated and circumvented a number of potential difficulties that would have made the process a lot harder. I'll explain what they were. There were also unexpected complications aplenty, of course, and I'll outline them so that future textbook authors might avoid them.

I'm pleased to think that those weeks of work will have resulted in not only my textbook, but also in this hopefully helpful list.

What I did right:

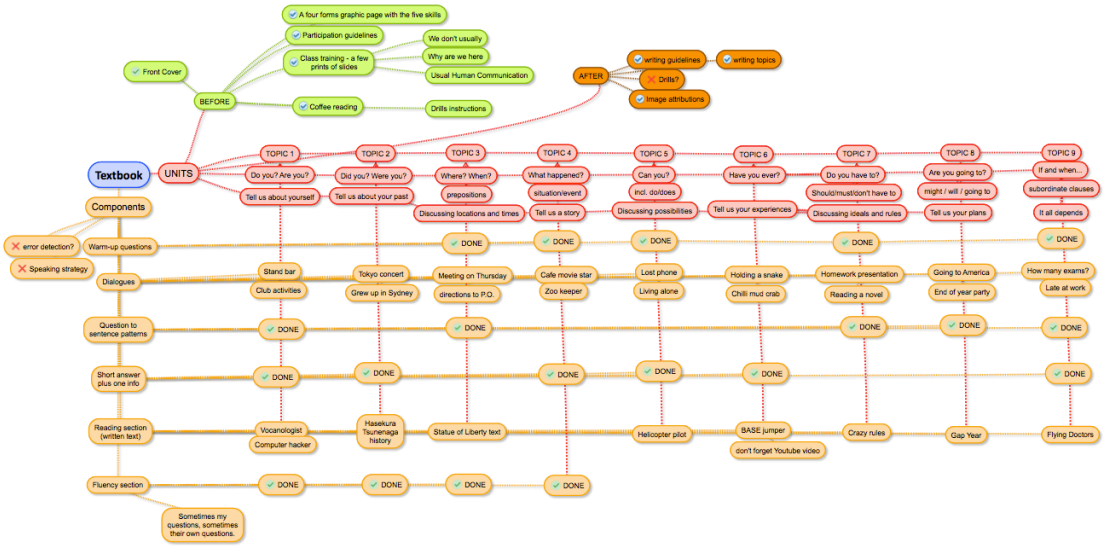
1) Using mind-mapping software to plan
2) Using familiar software only
3) Duplicating one completely laid-out unit for design consistency
4) Approaching ergonomics smartly
5) Recording image attributions every time

1. Using mind-mapping software to plan

The thing for which I was most glad through the entire process was having planned, prepared, and mapped the project out long before any actual content was written up.

I love mind-mapping software applications, the kind that allow text-box cells to be created, dragged around, linked, unlinked, and deleted so that connections, orders, and relationships between ideas can be represented visually. (Well known mind-mapping applications include SimpleMind, MindNode, Lighten, and Scapple. Searching any OS's app store for "mindmap" brings up lots.) One of the very first things I did on this project was open SimpleMind and set out a table-like matrix, with space for nine unit topics across the top and what got narrowed down to six repeated unit components down the left side. Ideas for the components came first: I knew I wanted to open each chapter with a warm-up/review item, followed by two example dialogues which would feature whatever

language element the unit was to cover. I then wanted a table introducing and demonstrating each unit's target question-answer forms that would be amenable to being utilised as an elementary interaction activity, then a short conversation section, a reading passage, and a fluency activity to end each unit off. (Other possible components were entertained but eventually, and for various reasons, jettisoned. The mind-map made doing that easy, too.)



The SimpleMind mind-map, showing units across the top, and components down the side.

Selecting the unit focuses across the top of the matrix came next. A unit dealing with present simple am/are/is and do/does, one with past simple 'did', a should/have to (obligation) unit, and so on. With the two axes drawn up, text-boxes of ideas on what kind of content could be written for each section in each unit could begin to fill out the table. For example, Unit 5, dealing with can/can't modals, could have a reading section dealing with a helicopter pilot and what he was able to do. The unit 4 introductory dialogue, presenting past continuous/past simple for narrative storytelling, could be an adaption of a true story of my own, about the time I walked into a cafe in Sydney and saw that a famous movie star (Hugo Weaving) was sitting alone drinking coffee and reading a novel.

The mind-mapping software allowed any and all ideas to be thrown onto the screen, deleted, changed, and re-ordered as necessary, again, long before any actual content was created. Gaps in content were plainly noticeable and I could give them the right attention before getting too far ahead of myself in areas that were already strong.

Once I had enough of a plan to go on, I began to create what I called 'draft documents' for each unit component, i.e. a file of introductory dialogues, a file of reading passages, etc, which would eventually be ready to copy/paste into unit files in the laying-out stage.

2. Using familiar software only

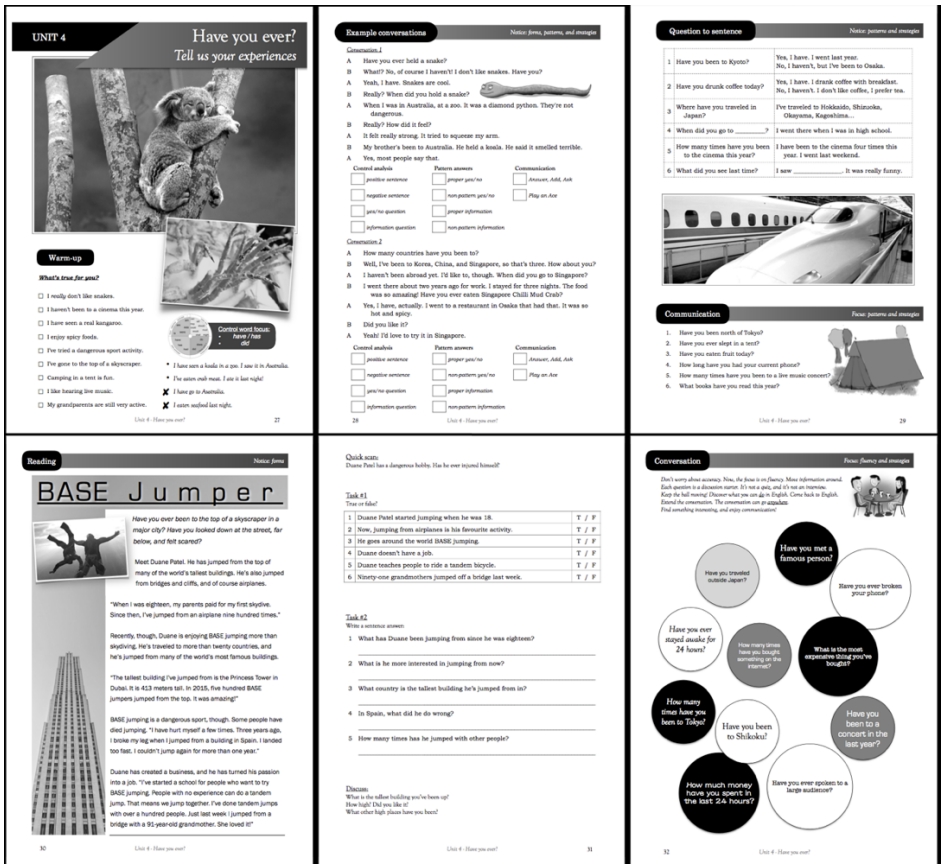
I created the textbook using Pages, which is the Apple equivalent of Microsoft Word. Several colleagues gawked at that, thinking of Pages as being significantly less powerful than Word or specialist publishing applications such as InDesign or Swift Publisher. They are no doubt correct, but it was a deliberate choice from the outset, and as the content-writing itself became more and more demanding I was relieved that I hadn't added to the burden by requiring that I become adept with a new and more-advanced software package. The

printing company had assured me that a PDF document was all I needed to produce, so sticking with a word processor that I already knew and liked very much turned out to be an enormously smart decision.

3. Duplicating one completely laid-out unit for design consistency

I don't recall which chapter was laid out first, but in doing so I took a great deal of time to come up with a general visual 'feel' that would later characterise the whole book. Through a lot of experimentation, fonts and sizes were chosen for all titles, unit headings, instructions, etc. A table style was chosen, with line thicknesses, font, size, and alignment settings arrived at and locked in. I often made hard copies to check my settings, knowing that what appears good on the screen can feel much too big, empty, or unbalanced on paper.

The process of trying, changing, fixing, and aligning the design elements of that first unit took days, and just went on and on until things were utterly satisfactory. Creating each subsequent unit file was simply a matter of duplicating it (Save as…), changing the name of the unit in the title and the footer, and then pasting text from the draft documents into the existing cells and text boxes, retaining the precise formatting and style of each.



Each component was carefully formatted so that content could be simply dropped in.

4. Approaching ergonomics smartly

I have a long history of RSI (repetitive strain injury) and a problematic neck, yet I was able to spend hour after hour, day after day on this project by following a strict approach to ergonomics. I know from experience that not paying attention to these concerns can have painful consequences.

I have an app installed on my computer (Time Out) that plays a bell sound every 20 minutes (my own setting), dimming the screen for 30 seconds, then restoring the screen and resetting the countdown. During that thirty seconds, I turn my head back and forth repeatedly, roll it round, flap my arms like a bird, roll my shoulders forward and back, or stand up to squat or kick. When the time is up, "Ding!" and I'm back to work. The muscles get to change position, the blood moves, the lactic acid washes away, and I go home at the end of the day without neck and shoulder pain. In fact, it kept my neck and shoulders so loose that in the week after finishing the textbook, when I wasn't using my computer much, the muscles seemed to tighten up without their 30-second release every twenty minutes!

5. Recording image attributions every time

I knew from previous projects how to locate and properly use Creative Commons-licensed photographs and images, either those in the public domain (CC license 0) or those licensed for usage given proper attribution to the photographer (CC license 2.0). However, I've been known to make a mess of record-keeping when choosing images, giving myself enormous trouble later when trying to create the legally-necessary list of attributions.

On the very first occasion of choosing an image to include in the textbook, I created a new Pages document, made a table for keeping records of sources, license types, and attributions, and then filled it in literally every time I downloaded an image I wanted to include; even for CC0 images that didn't require citations. When it came time to create the list of attributions to include at the back of the book, the work was already done, and it had taken just a few seconds each time.

The majority of the photographs I included came from Pixabay, a magnificent curated repository of photographs uploaded directly into the public domain (CC0), and others came from Flickr, which has many CC2.0-licensed images.

What I wish I'd known:

1) The sheer amount of time required
2) Creativity dries up
3) No laying out until all content is written
4) Image perfectionism is ridiculously time-consuming
5) Money evaporates

1. The sheer amount of time required

I knew that writing the book would take a long time, and that it would require a good degree of creativity. What I didn't anticipate is that I would end up looking back on the process as having been a significant life event. It was absolutely exhausting, and if I had known the amount of time it would take, I would NOT have committed to using the textbook in the upcoming semester. Once the true time requirements became apparent, I genuinely wished I could back out, choose a different textbook, and work at mine more gradually over the course of a year. The deadline was what it was, though, so the hours simply had to be put in, and that meant upwards of eight hours a day alone in my office just going for it.

If my experience is anything to go by, it would be wise, if embarking on such an endeavour, to make an honest prediction of how long it might take, but then to count on needing somewhere in the vicinity of double that duration.

2. Creativity dries up

Composing an essay or a piece of creative writing is one thing, but this kind of writing is unique. There's often a need for example sentences, to neatly present and demonstrate a language point in simple words without relying on or conveying much of a context. Coming up with a short sentence that demonstrates the meaning of "should" is pretty easy. ("You look sick. You should see a doctor.") But then, you might want to include one for "have to" that's different. Then an "ought to" sentence, and a "don't have to" sentence. A few sentences in, you start running out of ideas, and sometimes you need a lot of sentences. I would often find myself staring at the screen for minutes at a time, begging my brain to come up with another disconnected idea to fill one cell of a table. Once the idea would finally come, I would type it in in a matter of seconds, and then wrack my brain all over again for the next one. I found that the shorter the required item, the harder it is to come up with.

I wished I had carried out some kind of preparation that could have assisted in generating such short, unrelated ideas. What that might have been I never really had time to figure out, but in hindsight, compiling or referring to some kind of list of familiar archetypal and relatable 'characters' would have been a real time-saver. Also, having some kind of list of both typical and novel everyday things that people do in life, rather than looking around my stark office trying to remember what interesting things fill the rest of the world, would have saved a lot of time.

3. No laying out until all content is written

As glad as I was to have the mind-map to refer to as I composed and fleshed out each unit, I did make the mistake of beginning the layout process before the content texts were entirely complete. I had six units beautifully laid out, illustrated, and presentable, but then had to start from scratch on writing content for many of the components for the remaining units. It really felt like a step in the wrong direction and was a psychological blow as all my momentum was lost. Others might do well with a different approach, but my own strong advice would be to have the content text absolutely complete before getting started on the immeasurably more enjoyable process of bringing it all to life on the page.

4. Image perfectionism is ridiculously time-consuming

Thanks to the generosity of many excellent photographers, Pixabay, Flickr and other such websites are filled with an abundance of wonderful images. If you're a perfectionist, that can mean a time-management disaster. It was not uncommon for me to suddenly realise that I'd spent thirty minutes searching for the perfect image to go with a text passage, then eventually to realise that another twenty minutes had passed whilst apparently searching with my sights set lower. Giving up, I would settle for one of the first I had passed by, but spend another ten minutes finding it. Suddenly I had spent one hour to find one image, and I kicked myself repeatedly as it happened again and again. Obviously, this was untenable given that upwards of fifty images were needed.

My advice to perfectionists would be to quickly select a "that'll do" image, insert it into the document, and only if it really grates on you each time you see it should you spend more time looking for something 'better'.

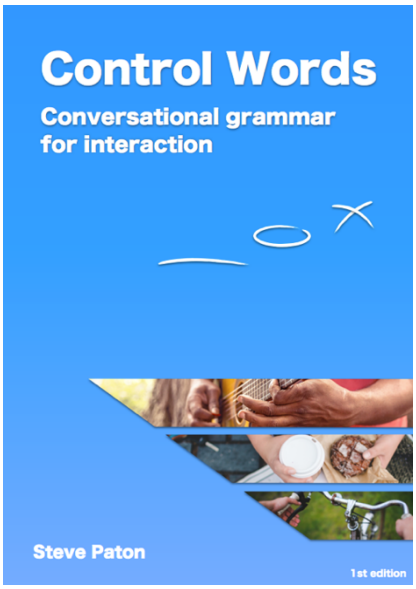
5. Money evaporates

I would be lying if I said that the prospect of earning money from book sales was not a motivating factor in going to all of this effort. I can say honestly, though, that it was not the primary objective. Being able to present and teach my own material, which involves a personal approach to grammar that no other textbook fully accommodates, was my main motivation. In fact, I knowingly wrote a book that no other teacher would likely be able make either sense or use of, so with no reach towards a larger 'market' than myself I feel comfortably immune from the charge that it was all a money-grab.

The university makes it very clear to teachers taking this self-publishing approach that the price they set for their book must be justifiable and fair in comparison to the broader market, and that if the system is abused it will be swiftly disallowed. The ethical implications of a teacher requiring their students to purchase their own textbook are obvious, and the university is right to not turn a blind eye to the situation.

Despite deliberately pricing my book firmly at the low end of the market, I must admit to disappointment when the balance sheet was finally drawn up. After the printing costs, the university bookshop's sales commission, and the 8% sales tax, what was left over for my months of work seemed eyebrow-raisingly small, especially when I considered that I'd need to pay income tax on it. I re-did the calculations a number of times before I was satisfied that the money hadn't just slipped through my fingers. Percentages here and there flying away certainly do add up surprisingly quickly. You're not going to become rich producing a textbook that only you can use!

Conclusion



I'm now using the third edition of my book, having tweaked it a little throughout subsequent vacations (a nowhere-near-as-time-consuming process as writing it!). All in all, it's been absolutely worthwhile to have gone to the effort, and I join those colleagues of mine who encouraged me to try it in recommending it to anyone in a position to do so. Taking full control of and full responsibility for the content that your students engage with in class can really transform your teaching experience.

Biographical Information

Stephen Paton (M. Ed TESOL, CELTA) taught English to international students in Sydney, Australia, for several years before coming to Fukuoka, Japan in 2008. He is a member of the Apple Distinguished Educators program and is editor of the JALT CUE SIG newsletter CUE Circular. He can be contacted at <home@stevepaton.com>