

ESL Lessons Using Real World Video and Audio Materials

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ESL instructors and materials developers have recently made a major push to begin integrating more authentic print material into the classroom curriculum. A number of recent textbooks have come out which include authentic print materials such as memos and resumes. Some textbooks create lessons around real radio news reports or actual interviews; however, not enough has been done to develop lesson templates that instructors can use as models in developing their own simple ESL lessons from the myriad audio and video resources that abound in the everyday environment of real-life. Taping automated phone messages from clinics, schools or employment ads, taping brief news broadcasts from the radio or TV or using short segments of popular films on videos are a few of the resources ESL instructors can tap into to develop quick and easy lessons for their classroom.

Any program that uses a range of materials, including print, audio and video, is enhancing its curriculum. When authentic audio and video is used, the instructor has a wider range of materials that can be tailored to meet the needs of learners. When choosing audio and video to use in the classroom we must first examine the real-life needs of learners. Do learners need to call companies and find out about local employment opportunities? An automated message from a local company listed among the newspaper want ads can be taped. Do learners want to be able to watch news reports and understand them? A current news report can be taped and a short lesson created around it. Do learners want to attend a parent/instructor conference, but do not know how to ask for a translator? A mock phone call can be created with the learner's request to be practiced in class. In this way, learners can hear and practice language they really need to learn and understand in their everyday lives. This is an educational experience no current textbook can give them.

Following are some guidelines and sample activities for using audio and video that can be easily adapted to an instructor's curricular purposes. When looking at the information provided here, begin with the following questions:

- Who are my learners?
- What are their language needs?
- How can I integrate this into my curriculum?

Brainstorm a checklist of ideas about learners. What do they do in real life that can be put into audio form and brought into the classroom; for example, do learners need or want to do any of the following activities?

Telephone skills

- Leave messages
- Understand messages
- Call employment hotlines
- Call their child's instructor
- Call a friend in English

Radio

- Listen to a news broadcast
- Listen to a weather report
- Listen to music

The checklist can be used to find out what learners want to learn. Then simple lessons can be developed around different areas of interest.

One quick way to create lesson handouts to use with authentic materials is to imitate the format of exercises from textbooks already being used with learners, especially those exercises that have been particularly successful and effective. This serves two purposes:

- 1) Directions are more easily understood by the learner because they are repetitive.
- 2) Instructors can create exercises faster when using a predetermined format.

Phone Skills

One skill most ESL learners want to learn is how to leave phone messages on automated answering machines. Give learners a partial script with blanks and help them modify it to match their real-life needs.

- **Leaving phone messages:** write, practice, call
Hello, my name is _____. My phone number is _____.
(message body – can change depending on student goals) I would like to apply for the mechanic position you advertised in the Star Tribune. Please let me know if it is still available.
Again, my name is _____ and my phone number is _____. Bye.

Learners write in the message they want to leave with the instructor's help, and they practice their script in pairs for pronunciation practice. Students can then tape their messages and have other learners or the instructor listen to the tape and judge the clarity of the message. As a follow-up, they can leave their message on the instructor's office phone for practice and evaluation. Eventually this practice should give

learners the confidence to begin leaving effective real-life phone messages. This type of activity can be adapted to imitate any real-life situation and to fit any level language learner, from beginner to advanced.

Learners often have a hard time understanding what they hear on the phone. One activity instructors can use with their learners is to tape phone calls or automated messages from local hotlines and develop simple worksheets around these taped calls. Using the checklist based on learner needs, choose an inappropriate type of phone call to tape. The following exercise was used with a Northwest Airlines Job Hotline recording:

- **Job Hotline:** listening practice

You will hear a list of jobs. Write down the correct number to press for each job listing.

Press ___ for administrative and other positions

Press ___ for mechanics

Press ___ for flight attendants

Press ___ for equipment service or aircraft cleaners

In this activity, learners practice a necessary real-life skill: finding out how to access information about employment opportunities (also listed in the CASAS competencies for ABE learners). If they call a hotline, they will need to be able to find and select the job that interests them. Follow-up exercises for this type of recording would be to listen and pick out information needed to apply for a job they are qualified for. The exercise developed should imitate as closely as possible what the real-life listening activity would be.

Press a number and listen to the job description.

- 1) What job did you choose? _____
- 2) What cities is the job available in? _____
- 3) What are the job's duties? _____
- 4) What are the minimum requirements? _____
- 5) What is the salary? _____
- 6) What is the job posting number? _____

The information learners are asked to access in this exercise would be necessary if they wanted to apply for a particular job. This type of activity can be used at a time when learners are studying other employment skills such as defining their employment goals, developing a resume or practicing interview skills.

Radio broadcasts

Radio broadcasts can provide a rich resource for teaching a wide range of language skills; for example, grammar, listening skills, vocabulary and idioms can be taught using radio broadcasts. In addition, learners are highly motivated when taught language lessons involving news broadcasts since there is the additional bonus of being informed about current events. This can help learners gain a better understanding of their larger community and United States culture as a whole.

Just as instructors scan their libraries and choose units or pages that can supplement a core textbook, they can begin analyzing audio resources with a critical educator's eye. Radio broadcasts should be chosen that include elements that coincide with curricular goals.

In the following example, a 60-second recording of a radio weather report was used. Using short segments makes it easier for learners to understand the material and for instructors to repeat audio segments with a range of language learning activities. By focusing on only a 60 second weather or news report it also become easier for the instructor to decide what information he or she wants learners to focus on and/or what skills to practice. The exercise can be made more or less complex to match the language skills of the learners. In this exercise the numbers are listed at the top of the activity. The teacher can warm up by modeling the numbers for the class, then asking learners to guess what numbers would go in which blanks (inference skills). During this preparation activity students can circle and define new words. Finally, learners would listen to the recording two or three times to hear and write in the correct answer. Between each listening activity

- **Weather report:** vocabulary practice, pronunciation, listening practice

Fill in the blanks with the following numbers.

10	15	50	47	20	27
2	25	10	7	40s	7

The sun has been up about an hour now and that's already helping the temperature. It's up _____ degrees this hour to _____. Under a clear sky, there's a little breeze from the southwest at _____ miles an hour. Sunshine, mild temperatures are forecast for today. The high should be around _____ with northwest winds at _____ to _____. Yesterday's high, by the way, was _____ degrees. Tonight increasing clouds, a low of _____ to _____. Tomorrow mostly cloudy with a low of _____. It's now _____ minutes past _____ o'clock.

This type of weather report activity can be repeated on a weekly basis until learners gain the confidence to listen to live weather reports on the radio. As learners gain confidence listening to radio broadcasts,

they can do follow-up exercises that include listening to pre-taped or live broadcasts and then doing classroom reports.

Looking at this weather report radio transcript, it is easy to think of other language lessons that could be developed for learners using the same broadcast. Here are some hints for using short broadcasts:

- Randomly tape a radio broadcast for about five minutes.
- Listen to the broadcast again and select short segments that could be interesting or relevant for learners.
- Brainstorm types of exercises that could be created with the segment.

Radio broadcasts can include local or international news, interviews, special reports, radio drama and commercials. As materials are developed, it is important to draw upon colleagues for help in brainstorming ways to use authentic audio creatively.

Authentic Video

When choosing authentic video, like audio, learners' needs must be considered when supplementing curriculum. Video can be a very versatile medium, particularly when used in short segments. Recordings of television news broadcasts, commercials and films can be used to visually illustrate many of the complex concepts instructors struggle to convey to their learners. A one-minute segment from a report on tornados can graphically supplement a unit in a textbook on safety issues and weather. A commercial on cars can be an excellent lead-in to a unit on using practical math and understanding how to balance a budget, or a grammar lesson on comparatives and colors. A two minute film segment can show a family sitting down to dinner. This can become an exercise to practice family relationship or dining room vocabulary, or for using the past tense to describe what people did in that short segment. The lesson can be as complex or simple as the instructor wants it to be, depending on learner ability and class goals.

Following are examples of lessons created with authentic video. In this first lesson, learners watch a one-minute news report on the tornado season. Before watching the video, learners should review a handout created by the teacher with a list of key vocabulary used in the segment. For lower-level learners, pictures should accompany the vocabulary. At this time, learners can be given a title for the segment and predict answers to a few key comprehension questions and discuss their predictions in pairs, to both practice the vocabulary and prepare them for the video content.

Tornado Segment: vocabulary and listening practice, prediction skills

Listen and check all information you hear/see in the video:

- When a tornado comes...
___ go to the basement

- ___ get under a table
- ___ go into the closet
- ___ get under the stairs
- ___ bring a cell phone
- When outside...
 - ___ go to low places
 - ___ go under a tree
 - ___ go into a ditch
 - ___ get into a car

Discussion

- Do you have tornadoes in your country?
- What dangerous weather do you have in your country?

The volume can be turned off the first time learners watch the video. All they will see is the film of people crouching under a table, avoiding windows and lying in a ditch. From this report, they will check off the information the segment gives. The second time, they will listen for additional information. This gives learners an opportunity to use different language skills, work on visual and contextual comprehension with reading clues, followed by listening comprehension. After each viewing, have learners compare answers and discuss differences. This will result in learners paying closer attention to the second viewing to either prove or disprove their answers.

Discussion of different types of dangerous weather can be a wrap-up of the exercise and a way for learners to practice newly learned vocabulary. A follow up activity could be a writing exercise where students describe a bad weather situation they have encountered and what they did in that situation. For ESL learners, understanding and responding appropriately to local weather conditions is often vital information that is not always provided by textbooks.

TV Advertisement

There is an anti-tobacco commercial that shows a woman driving in a car with a passenger. The passenger starts to smoke a cigarette and the woman then drives off the road nearly missing a tree, jumps over a ditch and then drives back on the road. The passenger is very upset and asks her what she thought she was doing. The woman replies that he had endangered her life and she was just returning the favor. All of this takes place in about one minute, with only a few sentences of dialogue. This advertisement can be converted into a quick and easy language lesson.

Here is a sample grammar lesson created around this segment. This could be a nice follow-up activity for study already done in the class on using the past tense. Before viewing the segment, have learners go over the exercise and guess the answers. If learners are very comfortable with past tense forms, they can be given the words in the present tense to write in the past tense when they fill in the blanks.

Practicing the Past Tense with a Commercial

- **Fill in the blanks:** hit, took, were, was, drove, went, started, got, was driving.

At the beginning of the film the woman _____ down a country road. There _____ trees on both sides of the road. The man _____ out a cigarette and _____ to light it. The woman _____ off the road. She almost _____ a tree. She _____ into a ditch. Finally, she _____ back on the road. The man _____ very upset.

The last part of the segment should not be shown for this activity (the conclusion where the woman explains why she drove like that). Stop this segment before the conclusion and just show the first part several times until learners complete the fill-in-the-blank exercise. Learners can then brainstorm reasons why the woman drove the way she did. Then ask the question, on an overhead, handout or written on the board, "Why did the woman drive so badly?".

After learners discuss this question, the end of the segment should be watched and initial discussion questions pro and against tobacco smoking can be revisited. This is a natural lead-in to an exploration of cross-cultural issues on cigarette and tobacco use.

Modifying lessons for higher/lower level learners

For higher-level learners, this same exercise can be made more challenging:

- Use some of the following words to describe what happened in the video segment: hit, took, were, was, drove, went, started, got and was driving.
- Begin with the sentence: "A woman was driving down a country road."

After learners write this story, they can compare stories and help each other correct their grammar. Then in small groups, learners discuss a possible conclusion to the discussion question and write about it. When they have written a conclusion, they can watch the end of the segment and decide whether they prefer the commercial's conclusion or their own.

For lower-level learners, the same segment can be used and the vocabulary practiced in story form. Sentences describing the action in the story can be typed on a handout and cut up to create a jumble exercise with the following phrases: The woman is driving. The woman is pulling off the road. The woman is almost hitting a tree. The woman is going into a ditch. The woman is getting back on the road.

Alternatively pictures (simple outlines and stick figures) can be used to illustrate each film shot. Students can put them in order to match the activities in the video and then use them to retell the story. Learners can label each picture with one word or one sentence. The instructor can mix the pictures up and have learners watch the commercial and then number the pictures and put them in the correct order. The segment can then be viewed a second time to check answers. Finally, learners can tell the story using the picture worksheet for support and illustration.

This particular commercial is flexible enough to use with learners of all levels. That will not be true of every television commercial. Video materials need to be chosen carefully and then exercises should be developed that focus learners on practicing the content or skill area appropriate to their language goals. Commercials are made to be attractive and stimulating and therefore lend themselves well to engaging and motivating learners.

Saving and sharing lessons

Coordinators and instructors can compile a binder of audio and video lesson plans for instructors to use as a resource to broaden their curriculum, and as a model when developing additional audio and video materials. This binder of lessons could be divided into topic areas, language skills taught or lessons for appropriate learner levels. Using authentic audio and video creatively and effectively makes the ABE curriculum more interesting and relevant for ESL learners.