

You Are The Course Book

by Matt Purland

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The Story of Baa Baa

The Story of Baa Baa

Once there was a gang of business persons who got together with the aim of making some serious money. They divided themselves into the following groups, each according to his or her preference. There were the course book writers and the publishers of materials, and the language school owners and the website operators, and the language experts, and not forgetting, of course, a great army of teachers – many of whom were really travellers, working their way around the world. Anyway this diverse group of business people organised themselves and got together for a business meeting. After talking long and hard for day and night they came up with an idea that was so deliciously simple yet so frightfully effective they couldn't quite believe they had come up with it. Their proposal was to design a language that was so rich and varied and so ridiculously difficult to master that it would keep them all in work until they could afford to finally retire. And they called their language: Baa Baa. Here we are privileged to be able to overhear part of their discussion:

'Shall we make it a direct language which is easy to use for communication?' suggested one. 'No,' replied another, 'We need to make it a subtle language with plentiful shades of meaning in each phrase. Let's give it lots of synonyms so that many different words can mean the same thing. The people who speak it will gain a reputation for not saying what they feel, and for being two-faced and distant, but I'm sure they'll be able to live with that.'

'Let's add at least eight thousand different idioms, so that students of the language can't tell what the native speaker means, even though they know what all the individual words in the sentences mean.'

'Good idea! And let's add the same number of phrasal verbs – yes more than eight thousand different verbs which all look very similar but which all have their own completely different meanings!'

'And don't forget to make it so that native speakers prefer to use phrasal verbs rather than normal verbs,' added another, learnedly.

‘And let’s add a multitude of slang phrases which are only understandable by select groups of people. That should confuse students a lot! They might even want to give up because they’ll feel like they haven’t got a chance of learning the real spoken language! Ha, ha!’

‘Yes, and while we’re at it, can we factor in vocabulary from every other language on the planet. We won’t bother changing the spellings to fit a particular spelling or sound system. Students will have to work it out for themselves – or go on a course!’ laughed a language school owner.

‘And let’s make it really hard to know how to pronounce this language, by making the spelling system and pronunciation system completely different from each other,’ suggested a Teacher. We could give it dozens of spelling rules which students have to learn. That will keep us in work for a good number of years!’

‘Let’s add a phonetic alphabet so that many millions of students will have to master not one but two different alphabets,’ said another teacher. The other looked at him in horror, fearing that a tool to help learners had been suggested in error. ‘Don’t worry,’ said the first teacher, smiling, ‘They won’t be able to master the phonetic one. Most of them won’t even bother trying. It’ll just be for show.’

‘Why not make it so that lots of different words sound the same but have different spellings. We could call them “homophones”. That should confuse students a lot – especially the beginners!’

‘And what about stress? Shall we give it a regular pattern of stress, let’s say on the first syllable of every word?’ asked one website owner rather naively. ‘No, what are you crazy?’ said one of the others, ‘We’ll make sure that the stress of a word can only be worked out by complete and utter guesswork.’ ‘Or by looking in a dictionary,’ said another, ‘Although most students won’t bother buying or carrying around one of those.’

‘But if we have stress, then we need some weak stress words,’ posited a little language expert, who hadn’t spoken yet. ‘What about if we had three words that had to go before nouns – let’s call them articles. You know, just three little words, but nobody would

know how to use them or when to use them – not even the highest-level learner! It'd be hilarious to watch them trying to master that! Ah, ha ha ha ha ha!' And he fell off his stool and had to be carried away. (He later returned wearing a little brown paper hat and carrying a glass of water.'

'Don't forget to include some sounds, for example a few consonant sounds, which will be impossible for many students to pronounce, no matter how hard they try, suggested an elderly course book writer. 'While we're at it, we could make sure that some of the most common words in the language include those sounds,' said another, 'Ha, ha, that would be really funny, yeah? A word people can't pronounce is the most common word in the whole language!'

'Ah, ha ha ha ha ha ha!' laughed a website owner as he imagined money raining down.

'Don't forget glottal stops,' warned a language school owner, 'And we could include a mysterious sound that could be in almost every single weak stressed syllable of the language, but which would remain an absolute mystery to learners of the language. Let's call it "the Schwa sound". Native speakers will use them all the time, but students will never manage to get them right!'

'Because they won't know about 'em,' coughed an ugly language school owner.

'Because we won't *tell* them about 'em!' laughed a veteran teacher, rubbing her hands together in glee.

'Ha, ha, that's a good one!' boomed a great big fat course director.

'Er, so what about tenses. You know, there are three basic times, right? Past, present, and future,' spoke up one teacher, anxiously.

'Yes, but to ensure the survival of our businesses – ' interjected a language school owner, 'To keep bums on seats at our academies and schools and summer schools – '

‘And to ensure that our course books keep on selling – ’ interrupted a course book publisher huskily.

‘– we’ll give our new language sixteen different tenses,’ continued the language school owner, ‘What do you think? Will that be enough?’

‘What about thirty or even sixty tenses?’ said one of the younger teachers optimistically.

‘No, I think that any more than sixteen and they’ll rumble us,’ said an older teacher who was leaning on an oak stick and dragging on a foul-smelling herbal cigarette.

‘Let’s leave it at sixteen then,’ they all agreed.

After the dinner had been served and everybody had had their cakes, the industrious business people resumed their important ruminations, with everybody in the room feeling that they were really onto something.

‘What about making it more complicated to understand this language by ensuring that the native speakers use a whole shed load of different accents, many of which sound completely different to the received pronunciation version, which we will teach almost exclusively?’ suggested one teacher.

‘And we could make this language popular all over the world by installing it as the first language of several major world powers,’ exclaimed a language expert, ‘And we could further spread it by making it the first language of the movies, television, communications, business, and the internet, and so on and so forth. You know?’

‘Yes, and then people will feel like they have to learn Baa Baa,’ said another, ‘Because everyone else is learning it. And they need to too. And we will absolutely rake it in!’

And over coffee and a rather tempting cheese board they all set to discussing how they would profit from the new language they had created:

‘We’ll make money by selling our specialist knowledge and writing skills to the publishers,’ said the course book writers.

‘And we’ll make money by selling the books they write,’ said the publishers, ‘And we’ll make it so that every student has to buy their own copy and that no copying is allowed! And when the teachers do copy the books – which they inevitably will, but OK, what can you do about it anyway? – we’ll sell the books as electronic versions for which you will need a whole shed load of really expensive electronic equipment. Ah, ha ha ha ha ha!’

‘And we’ll make money by selling expensive courses to students,’ said the language school owners, ‘And the courses will be taught by an army of inexperienced and barely-qualified teachers, but it won’t matter that they’re not very good because the course books will tell them what to do.’ At this point the course book writers awarded themselves a wry smile.

‘And we’ll make money by publishing content online and displaying highly targeted ads with it,’ said the website operators, ‘And we’ll make it so that users have to pay us subscriptions and log in to use the materials – which they won’t actually really *need* – although we might give them a handful of free printable worksheets; a free sample – let’s say five.’

‘And *we’ll* make money by making speeches about the language,’ said the language experts, ‘And running specialist teacher-training courses, and speaking at conferences, and pontificating, and coming up with new theories and new methods. Yes, we’ll gain reputations for being windbags and boring, but we’ll be well rewarded for our efforts. And we’ll write academic books that nobody will really want to read – and that most teachers won’t be *able* to read – despite them being set texts on the teacher training courses – and then we’ll sit back in our leather-backed chairs in our ivory towers and write some more.’

Finally the great army of teacher-travellers had their say.

‘We’ll make money by going into the classes, going through the course books with the students, trying to dodge awkward questions about the language, and generally just

sleep-walking our way through course after course. This way we will make enough money for travelling and we'll always have a job somewhere in the world. We'll never be unemployed because there will always be folks who need and therefore want to learn this language.'

One of the language experts ruminated on their plan, which they all believed to be foolproof: 'Countless millions of people will learn the basic words and phrases of Baa Baa; many millions of them will make it through to intermediate level but then get stuck and be unable to progress – and then, because it will seem too difficult they'll give up because they have become demotivated. A much tinier percentage will be persistent and not give up, and progress on to the higher levels of Baa Baa, but I confidently predict that they will never be able to get their pronunciation right – I mean, sounding like a native speaker. Never. Ever! Never! Ah, ha! Ah, ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!'

So this was their plan; and everything went very well for them for a time. And the teachers were happy because they didn't really have to know very much about the language, they just had to teach from the books. So they didn't have to know how to present the grammar points or model stress and pronunciation; instead they just said, 'OK, open your books. What page are we on then?' and off they would go – the students had to work. And they learned... a little; often in silence.

However, there was a small number of teachers who, because of an unnatural quirk in their chemical makeup, tended to do things their own way; who knew the grammar of the language well, and how to teach stress and pronunciation; who hated the course books because they made them passive and their students passive – and because they were so boring to use. And one by one they found one another and got together, until a group was formed and they began to plot a counterattack against the language that the course book writers and the publishers of materials, and the language school owners and the website operators, and the language experts, and the vast army of teachers had created. These strange rebellious individuals – acting as a group – didn't care about securing their future work, but only about how quickly and how well their students learned. They began to dream about a new language that would be simple and straightforward to learn; satisfying to teach; effective for communication; that had a logical grammar, and spelling that accurately reflected the pronunciation of a word. This

language would have words that meant what they said; where the meaning was clear; where there was no beginner, elementary, pre-intermediate, intermediate, upper-intermediate, or advanced levels, but simply two groups of students: those who could use it to communicate effectively and those who could not.

And they developed this language – a rival for Baa Baa – which they named Elum, and it spread across the world like wildfire. And the great army of teachers no longer bought from the big companies, because they weren't producing what they needed to teach Elum. Instead they created their own materials, using what they found around them; using simple techniques that practised the most needed parts of the language. And people learned this new language quickly and communicated easily and directly with one another. With greater communication came greater understanding, which led to harmony in the world – peace at last, and prosperity for all – all around the world. With the exception, of course, of the course book writers, and the publishers of materials, and the language school owners, and the website operators, and the language experts... until they began to change their materials and methods to suit Elum. Then slowly – ever so slowly – over time, began to make Elum more complicated, adding more rules, divorcing spelling from sounds, adding idioms, and phrasal verbs, and slang, and hidden meanings, until Elum became more difficult to learn than Baa Baa had ever been. And they were happy again. And they made money from making language learning as difficult as possible again – until the day when they could afford to – finally – retire.

24th April 2012

From: Matt Purland

ul. XXXXX

14-100 Ostróda

Poland

To: Mrs. M. XXXXX

XXXXX School of Foreign Languages

ul. XXXXX

14-100 Ostróda

Poland

Dear M.

Thanks so much for your offer to work for you next year at XXXXX School of Foreign Languages. I have really thought about it and I'm sorry but I won't be returning for another year with you. It's not that I don't enjoy working at your school. I really enjoy it, and I love the students. But the reason I don't want to work for you is that the work is so boring. This year we've worked through the whole course book from start to finish and the students have done everything they were supposed to do, but they are not really any further on in their understanding of English – in my opinion. I don't understand why you are so tied to the course book. You explained it to me once that the students expect to have a course book and their parents do too – most importantly, because it's their parents who are the ones who pay for the course for these high school kids! – but you have to understand that we don't *need* a course book to teach these kids English. I would go so far as to say that I hate the course book, and having to use the course book again is the main reason – no, in fact it's the only reason – why I won't be returning to work with you next year. Sorry.

All the best, yours

Matt

* * * * *

27th April 2012

From: Matt Purland

ul. XXXXX

14-100 Ostróda

Poland

To: Mrs. M. XXXXX

XXXXX School of Foreign Languages

ul. XXXXX

14-100 Ostróda

Poland

Dear M.

Thanks for very much for your kind letter. It was good to hear from you, as usual. ☺

Yes, I'm sorry too that we won't be working together, but I've had to kind of make up my mind what to do, and I can't stand it any more – more boring hours in the classroom. I didn't get into teaching for that. In the place where I started out teaching I was allowed to design the syllabus and create my own lessons based on that. You know, I worked with other teachers to do that. We didn't just follow the course book like a slave. Why can't I do that with you? Because of the course book. The course book *is* the syllabus, you have said. But the course book is not only the syllabus – but it takes over the role of the teacher too. In your school it has usurped my (our) role fully. I don't need to prepare lessons, even. I can just walk into the classroom and say to my students, "OK, which page are we on?" and they tell me, and I say, "OK, well let's start then. Do the reading, check any new words in your dictionary, then answer the true/false questions, the multiple choice questions, do the matching, match this and that," and so on, and so on. And I can sit back and do nothing. I can switch off, until it's time to check the answers; but I can read the answers from the teacher's book – or worse still just point at them on the interactive whiteboard that you had installed last year (I don't know why you bought that, I really don't), and I don't even need to look at the questions or engage with what the students are doing. I can go into "low-power mode", or just switch off altogether. I spend most of my time looking out of the window, to be honest.

Think of the money, my wife says, and other teachers say, “Oh, just do it for the money, Matt. What does it matter if the students learn anything?” Well I was trained so that it did matter whether the students learned something. But they aren’t learning with the course book. I feel like the course book has taken away my teaching role. The students have to cover everything on every page, but a lot of it is not social – not interactive – and it could be done at home, rather than in the classroom. In the classroom they have got a unique opportunity to speak in English with other people. They have got a chance to speak with me, a native speaker of the language. Instead they are reading texts which do not interest them (in my opinion) and answering the same three types of question again and again – true or false, multiple choice, and matching. If they’re not doing that then they’re doing grammar exercises, which again they could do at home or online or with a CD-ROM in their own time. I don’t need to do a grammar presentation, by the way, because the book does it for me. I just tell them to read the bit in the book about the grammar point, then answer the questions. If they don’t get it, it doesn’t matter to me (just think of the money, right?) and the point usually doesn’t come up again during the course, except for in a test. All too often it feels like if they miss the week on present perfect, or whatever, then they miss present perfect.

Do I sound angry? Yes, I’m a little bit angry. I feel like you have been wasting my time for the past seven months, since September. Every week I have been to your school to teach, twice a week for two hours each time, but I haven’t been *allowed* to teach. I’m just a drone, a robot facilitating the course book. The course book is the teacher, not me. When did I become just a passive functionary, instead of an educator, which is what I trained to be – what I wanted to be? You are not using me to my full potential. I can teach. I don’t want to just tell them to open the book and do the exercises. Anybody could do that. I’m fully qualified and educated to a high level, but in your classes I don’t really need to do anything except show up and make sure they don’t mess about (or leave early). The interactive whiteboard makes it worse, because (when it actually works) it even does the auxiliary things that I used to do, like finding the listening part on the CD or finding the answers in the teacher’s book. A few clicks and everything is there on the board for the students. So then, what is my role?

The problem is that when I’m bored, it tends to show, and the students get bored. Most of them hate the course book as well. After seven months of the same book they are like,

“Have we got to do XXXXX book again?” And I say, “Yes, we have to do one spread [two pages] per lesson. If we finish it we can play a game or something...”, but frankly I can’t be bothered to prepare anything like a game. When you treat me like just a baby-sitter for the students – when you don’t respect me as a professional and let me teach – why should I motivate myself to provide something different and fun? To be honest the whole thing can be summed up like this – the course book market is a bloody racket. It stops students from using their own creativity, and it prevents teachers from teaching English – it exists solely to make money for business people. In fact, I believe that the course book publishers have deliberately and cynically done what all successful business people do – they have created a need where there wasn’t one before and then encouraged a dependency upon it. (I’ve written a short story about this. I did it during one of my classes at your school, actually, when the students were doing a reading comprehension and I had nothing to do). I hope you won’t mind reading it through. I have enclosed it here: *“The Story of Baa Baa”*.

I’m only writing this because I want you to understand my reasons for not teaching with you next year. Of course I still want to be friends with you. In fact our friendship still means the world to me. But after ten years as an English teacher, I can’t go on like this. I am over-bubbling with ideas on how to teach, to communicate this wonderful language. I can’t do any more spreads, M. I can’t do it, because I am betraying myself and I just feel like I’m wasting my time. I’m wasting my time. And time is so precious. I hate wasting time, above all things, because we don’t know how long we have got on this planet, do we? I work in three different language schools, including yours, and in all three I have to use a course book, but the frustration is always the same. The students are not engaged, I’m not interested, the clock is ticking, and the time is just wasted. Yes, money is being made for everybody, but money isn’t everything. I know *you* understand that actually, because you are not materialistic like other people I know. But, M., can you see my point, dear?

You asked me, “Well, what is the alternative?” You got a bit hot and bothered – even angry – as you asked it: “So, what, do you expect me just to let you walk into the classroom and do whatever you want, Matt?” Well, what do you think I would do in that situation? I think it looks like you don’t really trust me to do my job. If I was a plumber, I would be employed to go to a specific location and do a particular job, right? My boss

would send me there, but he or she wouldn't tell me step by step how to fix the problem. They would just trust me to know how best to do it. Why don't Directors of Studies and Language School Owners understand that they can trust qualified teachers? Instead you give us an idiot's guide to the lesson (the course book and teacher's book) that we have to follow to the letter – and the students have got so used to this that they will complain to you about it if we don't do every single tiny exercise. Why not let me do my job? OK – yes – plan a syllabus and I will follow it, but let *me* choose the route – the way to do it that best suits me, and the students I'm caring for. But people like you (no offense, M.) don't trust language school teachers. I know you don't. "Oh, we've been bitten too many times in the past," you might say. Hmm. You don't know, but I am going to propose to you in this letter a whole brand new system for teaching English in language schools without a course book. You don't know, but it works really well. I've been trialling it with my private students at home. Yes, at home. I've been trying it out – when I can – in my language school jobs (which you and the other DOS's don't know about, but you probably wouldn't care anyway, because you are so busy and overworked). I think I'm really onto something here. This could be really big! Let's get rid of the course books forever and teach the students ourselves! When did big business people take our jobs away? "But what about your own course books and materials," you might say, "that you've written?" Well, yes, it's true that I have written hundreds and hundreds of pages of material for learning and teaching English. And they're all online free for anybody to download from <http://www.englishbanana.com>. That has been my hobby. But I have found a way where I don't need to do it any more. Yes, don't be shocked! But, I have found a way. Why should I carry on writing materials and books ad infinitum? I've found a different way – a better way – a higher path!

"What about Talk a Lot books," you might say? Yes, I have written three elementary courses; one intermediate course; one foundation course on pronunciation; one handbook for the elementary courses, so that makes six big manuals or course books – plus I started writing a second intermediate-level course book. "What about those," you might ask. (Are you still reading this now, M.? I hope so; please do think about it and give me some feedback on what you make of it, won't you? You have helped inspire me to do this. You've really inspired me, M.) "They have done really well," you said to me once, a little patronisingly, but you still said it anyway. Yes, over 850,000 copies have been downloaded from the internet to date. That figure is verified and public. And that's

free downloads, I might add. If they'd all been paid downloads I'm sure I wouldn't be needing to work for you – or for anyone else – at all, even ever again! How many proper published course books can say that they have that many copies in print – in the hands of people who've printed them out themselves? And the books are *popular* – people like them. I get a lot of positive feedback about them, day in day out, week in week out. The Talk a Lot materials are about enabling and educating teachers to use techniques for teaching spoken English, rather than to be tied into the more fixed structure of course books. Yes, people do say nice things about Talk a Lot, like:

“Hi Matt, thanks for making this available for us to download online. Much appreciated. You've helped a lot of youth in Sri Lanka!” (Susan)

“Thanks a million for sharing this.” (another downloader at Scribd.com)

That's great, but now I'm going to propose that they don't need any course books – not even free ones. Not even my ones! This brings up the point about the price of course books and materials, like interactive whiteboards and so on. I know how you sweated to get hold of just one of those whiteboards, which in my view are simply white elephants, because all you really need is any plain good old-fashioned board – be it black or white. For the manufacturers of interactive whiteboards it is money for old rope. They are reinventing the wheel, and you are paying through the nose to get hold of one. Not only are they expensive – not to mention having to buy the projector (which I concede is useful for watching films in class when you are not there) – but most of the time they don't even work – and nobody knows how to fix them. You have to get someone in from the head office. How many times have I complained to you about the special pen not connecting with the electronic whiteboard, rendering the whole kit and caboodle a complete waste of time? How it winds me up! You don't need all this rubbish. (I know I'm ranting, and yes, I complain a lot, but you know that it is because I'm a perfectionist. I want to do my best. I am not only in it for the money, like some teachers.) What about the price of course books themselves? Students in one of the schools where I work are paying around £20 to buy their course book. Then, if a student has to have a course book, then they'll probably also have to buy the accompanying workbook, which costs the same again, or more if it has a 'free' CD-ROM or DVD (or both). If the student is doing more than one course, as many of them are, they'll have to fork out over £100 just

on books and resources. (They often buy all of this, but then fail to buy the one thing which they really do need – a good, easy to carry, bilingual dictionary.) But you don't need all these products to learn English. Also, if people can't afford to buy material, they tend to copy it. But the course books strictly prohibit doing this, forcing schools to make uncomfortable moral choices.

Anyway, the Talk a Lot books were always different from traditional course books, since they gave teachers tools and materials that they could use in lots of different ways to plan lessons, rather than the linear “bitty” approach that course books have, of “OK, let's do this small section, then this bit, then this bit, and then this...” Yes, late last year I tried to write some intermediate-level Talk a Lot units in the style of a traditional course book. This turned into the first eight units of the then-proposed *Talk a Lot Intermediate Book 2*. But I'm not going to continue with it. I learned a lot about laying out the pages so that the material looked appealing and engaging. I tried to include a lot of Talk a Lot-style speaking and listening activities, but I know that I ended up falling into the same trap as the standard course books fall into, i.e. creating pages of material full of exercises that could be done by an individual at home, rather than material that was suitable for speaking and listening, and pair and group work in the classroom.

But anyway, now, after working on this latest project, I've realised that I don't need to write any more Talk a Lot materials. Or even any more materials at all! You see, I have discovered the secret of teaching English without a course book – even without any materials at all. If I tell you, will you consider letting me do it in your school next year? If you will, I will come back, gladly. But if you insist on using the course book, I will stick it out on my own and just work from home. I don't care about losing income because what I'm interested in most of all is *time well spent*.



Well, I've gone this far and I've told you this much. I might as well share with you what I've discovered. I think we could use this method as a basis for all our courses next year – assuming that we are still going to work together. See what you think, M. The idea is that we don't need course books to teach English, because the students, with the teacher's guidance, can provide everything necessary for sufficient learning to take place so that they pass their exams. My new way is called, “You Are The Course Book”. The “You” means the students and the teacher together. The course book has usurped the

teacher's role in many classrooms; it's time to take back the right to teach. If the course book was the teacher, then now I'm saying to teachers and students: "You Are The Course Book" – the lesson is inside of you. In other words, it is time to bin the course book. (Don't worry, it will be out of date after a few years anyway, through planned obsolescence, while this method will not be.)

Can I sketch it out for you a little bit? (You know that you are so important to me, and I really value your opinion highly – more highly than anyone else's.)

You Are The Course Book

Teach And Learn English Without A Course Book

All You Need Is Paper And Pens (Stationery)

Allowing Students And Teachers To Finally Think For Themselves

From Dependency On Published Materials To Self-Reliance

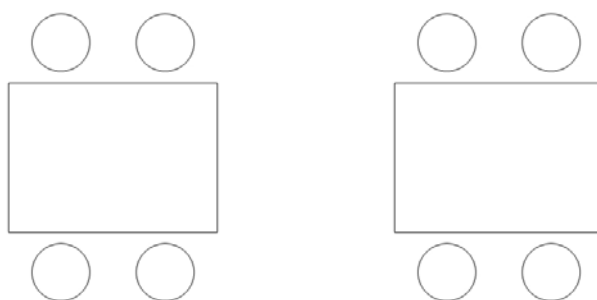
This is a method that can be used with groups or individuals at any level from Elementary upwards, teen or adult, and with any duration of lesson. For example, if you meet the same class for four hours a week, you will probably complete one full process in that time; but if you meet an individual adult, say, for one 45 minute lesson per week, you could spend three or four weeks completing the process. The time is "rolling time" rather than "fixed time". You work on each stage for as long as you and the students want to, then move on to the next one. When the lesson finishes, you make a note of where you got to (on the *"Progress Tracker"*), and continue from that point on at the start of the next lesson. You finish the whole cycle when you finish, rather than at a pre-determined point. So far, I have used this method with teenagers in different language schools, and with adult learners (in groups and individuals) in my classroom at home. In each situation the results have been thrilling. The students are making good progress and it is exciting to observe them *thinking hard*, rather than simply "going through the motions" of the course book. As an added bonus, the time flies by in these lessons – maybe because I'm engaged in the lessons too and not clock-watching. I intend to pursue

this method and write about it the more we discover. With this method the lessons feel like a shared adventure – a journey which the teacher and student or students take together – on which, although the participants know the stages along the way, nobody quite knows what the result will be.

I turn up to the class with nothing. No course book, no teacher’s book, no CD player, no laptop, in fact no technology at all is necessary – apart from a board and pen or chalk. This is low-tech stuff! On the other hand, you *can* use technology (including that frustrating interactive whiteboard) if you have it. But it is not essential. The students should have:

- a notebook – preferably A4, lined, with pages that can be easily and neatly removed
- a pen – black or blue ink
- a dictionary – bilingual, modern, easy to carry around (compact)
- an open mind and a willingness to learn

Students should be arranged facing one another, e.g. with four to a table, like this:



rather than sitting in rows facing the teacher. Our work is student-centric, rather than teacher-centric. The teacher is a guide, not the fount of all knowledge.

I’m going to take you through how I’m using this method at the moment, but there are potentially thousands of different combinations for putting lessons together – without a course book.

We're going to travel through the seven stages of the process together:

1. Vocabulary
2. Text
3. Grammar Point
4. Verb Forms Revision
5. Pronunciation
6. Free Practice
7. Writing

So, I walk into the class with nothing, like I say. All we've got is a whiteboard and the students sitting as described above, with their pens, notebooks, and dictionaries on the desks in front of them. No one is chewing gum!

Revision and checking homework

We spend about ten minutes looking at the main points from the previous lesson, and marking homework exercises and answering any remaining questions. It may be that we have to do a short test, e.g. vocabulary or grammar at this stage too.

1. Vocabulary

I ask them for eight interesting and random content words or phrases. I write them on the board. When they give me something boring, like "table" or "student" I tell them it's boring and vanilla and I want something "interesting and random". Encourage them to go for higher level words, so instead of "happy" they could use a stronger adjective, like "delighted"; or instead of "circle" they could use a less well-known shape like "diamond". The words can be any kind of word, but they must be content words, so not prepositions or articles, and so on. An alternative is to give the students categories to work with, e.g. "a person", "a place", "a thing", "a time", "a piece of furniture", etc. Or you could ask them for eight interesting and random words beginning with... a particular letter of the alphabet. That will get them reaching for their dictionaries (which is never a bad thing). When we've got eight (you could vary the number, according to the level), we check that everybody knows what they all mean, and then I tell them to write them down in their notebooks and mark the stressed syllable in each one. We check this on the board,

and look at any other interesting features, e.g. silent letters, or aspects of connected speech.

2. Text

Then I tell them that they are going to make a text by writing one sentence each on the board* and that they must include all of these words somewhere in the text. Every student should write one sentence on the board, no matter how short. The text could be a story, a letter, a dialogue, a promotional text – anything. Maybe the students will choose the type of text randomly, or you may already have an idea of what you want to practise before you go into the class, e.g. your syllabus tells you to practise writing a formal letter.

(*If there is a laptop, the teacher could type each sentence as it is said. The student says “full stop!” when they have finished their sentence. This is especially good if you do have a projector hooked up to the laptop because the students can see the text growing on the board in front of them in typed form.)

2.1 First Draft – Getting the Initial Ideas

Each student writes their sentence and the other students can help them, but the final form should be their own. You shouldn't help or correct them at this stage, but you might guide them if they really draw a blank. When the last student comes up, remind them that they should somehow finish off the text. It goes without saying that the different sentences should complement one other and continue one after the other, rather than being separate, self-contained ideas. At this point the students have created the first draft of the text from their own ideas, using their imaginations and knowledge of English.

2.2 Second Draft – Corrections

One of the things cited in favour of the course book is the “wealth” of interesting texts, but in this method the students produce their own text. You will be amazed what true riches in terms of creativity lies inside your students waiting to be called for. When you give them a course book, you don't ask them to contribute and that creative fire remains inside. In this method *they have to do everything*. So the text is on the board, in its first draft state. I say to the students, “Can you see any mistakes here?” Everybody laughs.

Yes, of course, there are a lot of mistakes. I can usually see mistakes with verb forms, e.g. everything is in present simple, instead of a variety of verb forms, and function words (those horrible little words that fall in between the content words), so things like articles, prepositions, auxiliary verbs, and so on will be wrong. I ask the students to work in pairs and correct the mistakes. They do this and I can have a cup of tea for a few minutes... I mean, walk around the pairs guiding them and eliciting answers. Then I ask the whole group for feedback. Maybe I will pick on somebody and ask them to come to the board to make the corrections, which the rest of the board call out. I am careful to ensure that by the end of this stage the text is completely grammatically correct. I may need to guide a little more with some groups, e.g. lower-level groups, than others. However, the great thing here is that the errors (grammar, spelling, punctuation, sense, etc.) that we focus on are the ones which are most relevant to the group, because they are the mistakes that the group has made that day. In the course book the syllabus is fixed – everybody learns what is in the book at the same time, regardless of whether this is what they most need to learn at this point. In this method students are more motivated because they can see that it is *immediately beneficial* to them. As I teacher I guide them, trying to *elicit* everything from them without telling them – but telling them as a last resort. As a general rule, in this method the students should do the work, not you. You are a guide. There will usually be somebody in the group who can point out a particular error. We are activating the group's present knowledge of, among other things, English grammar, spelling, punctuation, and vocabulary – which can only be a good thing. Time well spent. When the text has been corrected I congratulate them. Usually, by now, the text is at a high standard compared to the group's normal written work – largely because the grammar is perfect. I congratulate the students on the lesson text that *they* have produced (not a bookish course book writer living in New York), but I inform them that it can still be much better; and so we move on to the third draft – improvements.

2.3 Third Draft – Improvements

It may be that the text is a bit dull and pedestrian; there may be bits that don't make sense, which can be edited out, or phrases that students want to change. Students will naturally (the first few times) write about something close to home, e.g. table, book, student, chair, etc. as vocabulary words, and sentences about going to the shop, going home, parents, family, likes and dislikes, etc. Encourage them to think outside the box. For example, if the group are trying to write a story and somebody goes to a restaurant,

make something happen there, not just that they have dinner there. What activities could occur there? What kind of story is it? What genre? Comedy, horror, romance, etc.? (Of course you could set the story's genre before you begin the lesson.) I ask students to work in pairs or small groups and set about improving the text, so after this stage the text has gone from something correct that the whole group agreed upon, to as many different texts as there are small groups (or pairs), and errors will again creep in since students are working without the teacher. However, they are working in a positive way towards a clearly defined goal. All the time the students are encouraged to see the writing process as something that can go through different stages, not simply something they dash off in one quick, error-strewn draft, while watching TV or chatting online (or both – plus playing video games) and then hand in, sometimes smeared with jam, and produced with almost zero effort or thought.

These are areas they could improve upon (you might be able to think of more):

- | | |
|-----------------------|----------------|
| 1. Title | 5. Motivations |
| 2. Vocabulary | 6. Actions |
| 3. Sentence Structure | 7. Results |
| 4. People | 8. Details |

1. TITLE

Give the text a name or title.

2. VOCABULARY

Can we replace boring everyday words with more interesting or unusual words? Use synonyms – English has a rich vocabulary! Identify the difference between everyday and interesting words, e.g. “Mercedes” is more specific, and therefore more interesting, than the generic word “car”, “timepiece” is a higher-level word than “watch”, and “a peculiar old butcher with a limp” is more intriguing for the reader than “an old man”, etc.

Students should use adjectives to describe nouns, where they can, and adverbs to describe actions, when possible too. Could we include idioms, phrasal verbs, slang, dialect words? If it's a dialogue, have we used contractions, which certainly would be used, e.g. “He's” and not “He is”, etc.? Can we use specific places and company names,

e.g. “Hotel Rembrandt”, not just “hotel”, or “Cadbury’s Dairy Milk” instead of “chocolate bar”?

3. SENTENCE STRUCTURE

It’s highly likely that students have opted to write short sentences, if only to be allowed to sit down quicker, or to minimise their chances of making mistakes. (But students must get used to other people seeing their mistakes and helping to correct them. We must foster a sense of shared empathy in the group rather than tolerating an atmosphere of competition – where students are laughed at for using an article incorrectly.) If the board is full of short sentences, albeit ones that are correct grammatically, can we not make them longer by using conjunctions (and, but, because, etc.) or relative clause words (which, that, who, whose, etc.)? Encourage students to do this. Another common mistake that will often crop up is when a student tries to join two clauses in a sentence with just a comma, instead of a dash, semi-colon, or conjunction.

4. PEOPLE

If it’s a story: who are the main characters? What are their names? What do they look like? What do they do? How do they *feel*? If it’s a letter: who is the person writing? Who are they writing to? Why? What were they doing immediately before writing the letter? What will they do afterwards? and so on. Bring the people to life.

5. MOTIVATIONS

Why do the people behave as they do? What do the people want? How do the people feel about what happens/has happened, etc.? How do they feel about their past, present, and future? What’s going on inside their heads? This is *interesting* to the reader – and you can be sure that it is interesting to the students too, who are working now without even bothering to check the clock on the wall. You aren’t clock-watching either, as you monitor each pair and group. The time is flying by! You’ll be surprised when it is nearly the end of the lesson! There won’t be enough time to finish, but you’re not concerned. Time is not an issue in this method. The process is everything. You can simply pick up again where you left off next lesson.

6. ACTIONS

If it's a short story: there could be at least four actions or main events. Of course, it depends on the length of the story. I would suggest at least eight sentences, so if you are doing this process with an individual student they need to produce at least that many sentences to make it worthwhile. What actions occur? Are the actions interesting or ordinary? Make them extraordinary rather than pedestrian! If it's a letter, there could be at least four main points (paragraphs), which follow a logical order. What has happened in the past? etc.

7. RESULTS

What are the outcomes? What happens? How does it end? Bring things to a conclusion. If it's a story: the actions should lead to a final result that affects the different characters in different ways. If it's a letter: the writer should follow the correct protocol for ending a letter, and so on.

8. DETAILS

Can we add any more details to make the text more interesting and readable? As we've already seen, using adjectives and adverbs could help, e.g. if there is a "jacket" you could make it "a smelly old jacket". If somebody "walks" to a park, they could "walk quickly" or – using an idiom instead of a plain adverb – "walk at top speed". Another example would be to use the idiom "at the stroke of midnight" to replace the vanilla phrase "at midnight".

During this time, you should be walking around checking the students and guiding them as they make their improvements. When students have done enough – maybe it is starting to drag – one person from each pair or group reads their improved story out loud to the whole group. You can correct errors verbally, or highlight a few points on the board. Don't try to catch every error now at this stage. The students – and you too – will be delighted by the huge difference now between the first draft (initial ideas) and the third draft. It really will be incredible what a difference two revisions have made!



So now we have the third draft of the text, but it will be different for each group. Nobody will check or mark this draft, but students will use it as the basis for writing their

fourth and final draft – an individual written assignment which will occur towards the end of the process.

3. Grammar Point

During the corrections and improvements stages you have been labouring various grammar points that pop up, e.g. “article before noun” and “infinitive after modal verb” etc. If you have time and feel it is necessary – or if it is part of the syllabus that you have devised – you could do a grammar presentation at this point using PPP method: presentation, practice, and production. For example you could outline on the board the use of articles, then improvise some sentences with the students based on this, then ask them to write ten (or however many) sentences of their own using articles. Or you could use a page from a grammar book or a pre-prepared worksheet at this stage, but it is not essential. One of the problems with course books is that they explain the grammar point to the students. Surely the teacher should be allowed to present grammar. It’s another job that the course book has robbed teachers of. And anyway, if teachers don’t have to present English grammar, how can they really learn it and become confident in using it themselves? By the way, yes, I did say syllabus, just now! We may not have a course book or a lesson plan – just a general outline (see “*Outline of Mode 1 and Mode 2*”), but you may want to prepare a syllabus that you and all the other teachers work to, so that you cover an agreed amount of grammar, vocabulary, and so on, during each term.

4. Verb Forms Revision

So we move on swiftly and seamlessly to the next stage in the process. I quickly write some question words on the board and ask the students to write down a question beginning with each one, where the answer is something from the text. For example, I write on the board:

WHAT	WHY
WHERE	WHICH
WHEN	HOW
WHO	DID*

and the students supply the rest of the questions, plus a short answer. For students it seems to be instinctive and they quickly grasp what they have to do. The reason for

doing this is to iron out any problems with question forms such as, “What they do in the garden?” It’s a regular opportunity to remind students about tenses – which all students struggle with – and what the form is for positive, negative, and question forms – and which auxiliary verb is used for which tense. In my opinion students can’t do this kind of work often enough. If they get bored doing it because they know all the forms, then I will know that I have done my job! The problem with course book grammar exercises, reviews, and end of unit tests is that students can get 80-90% or more when it is just gap-fill and matching questions, and it looks like they are doing really well on the course. But if you ask them another time to write a sentence in present perfect or whatever – positive, negative, and question form – they get it completely wrong. Yet their course book test results call them high-flyers.

Another activity during this stage is to give students some sentence blocks work to do (see *Talk a Lot Elementary Handbook* for full instructions), based on individual sentences from their third draft texts – work which will have the same kind of results – or to give them a Verb Forms Revision Test (see “*Verb Forms Revision Test – Blank Test*” and “*Sample Answers*”). Students need to repeat this kind of work often and in this method they can – using sentences that they have produced themselves, rather than the course book author. How much more rewarding! In the course book a verb form or grammar point may be mentioned once and then never explicitly repeated until the next level. In this method students are doing what is important, using content that comes from inside of them, rather than generic texts that are cynically designed to appeal to everybody learning English around the world, from Buenos Aires to Tokyo.

(*For some reason I have found that eight is a good number for this kind of work: eight vocabulary words, eight sentences, eight question words, and so on. Ten seems like perhaps too many, while six is not enough. Funny but true!)

5. Pronunciation

For “Pronunciation”, read “Sentence Stress” and “Connected Speech”. How many times do these vital pronunciation topics crop up in the average ESL course book? Not very often. In this method students have to learn to do both as a matter of course on a regular basis, and it is given the same prominence as everything else in the process, rather than being something exceptional that only the most eccentric teacher is allowed to wheel

out once a year. The teacher asks a few students to write a sentence from their third draft text on the board. Of course errors should be corrected straight away. The teacher elicits:

- the content words, which are underlined
- the stressed syllables, which are marked

and the whole group examines the parts of the sentence which are not stressed – the weak stressed syllable chains. What happens here? Probably contractions, elision, squeezing of sounds, reduction of vowel sounds, with Schwa sounds appearing where the vowel sounds are weak, glottal stops replacing t and d sounds, and so on. The students learn about all of this. There is more detail about teaching pronunciation in my previous book, *Talk a Lot Foundation Course*, which is also a free download.

To look at connected speech, the teacher breaks one or more of the sentences down into its syllables and elicits the sound connections from the students, e.g. is it CV, CC, VV, or the preferable VC? If we know this, we know more or less which features of connected speech to use. Do your students know what the features of connected speech are? Do you? The students practise saying each sentence and different phrases from them using stress and connected speech. This kind of information is golden, because it can be applied by the students to any sentence in English. But how often is this covered in a standard course book? There isn't room, what with all the big glossy photos, texts about life in the United States (favouring the American market), and comprehension questions. Students can't really do this kind of work at home. The classroom is the perfect place to try it, but too often we're using classroom time for silent reading.

6. Free Practice

The teacher or students can choose from a list (see "*Free Practice Activities*"), for example creating a role play or dialogue based on the situation in the text, or spend time speaking with a partner or small group using discussion questions that you or the students have made yourselves (see "*Write Your Own Discussion Questions*") – based on a topic that comes out of the text naturally. This is an opportunity for students to speak with one another freely, without anybody correcting every single mistake, but you the teacher are still walking around each group with a clipboard, pen in hand, not clock-

watching, but listening carefully, *avidly* even – guiding, and writing down mistakes, that can form the basis of a whole group feedback session on the board towards the end of this time. It’s fascinating for the teacher to see the students at work like this – and to think that this has all flowed from... nothing. You went into the class with nothing. Not even an idea for a topic. Let the students do the work and they will be happy – and make your life happier. This is also a valuable opportunity for the students to let their hair down a bit and to let off some steam after working so hard on the first five stages of the process. They might reflect on what they have achieved so far. They have learned some new vocabulary; created, corrected, and improved a short text; practised a grammar point that was pertinent and relevant to where they are on their journey learning English; they have practised verb forms that are relevant to them, which they perhaps weren’t completely 100% sure of when they came into the classroom that day; and studied sentence stress and connected speech – something which their friends at other schools seem to hardly ever or never do; and they feel quietly pleased about being able to get to grips with this pronunciation business. They have spent virtually the whole lesson working with a partner or group, or – even better – with a variety of partners and groups, and speaking in English – rather than just reading out a text from a course book (or worse, reading it in their heads during class time) and answering uninspired questions that they could just as easily have finished on their own at home (with loud music or the telly on). They have been speaking English – what they signed up to do in the first place – and yet even after all that speaking practice and pair and group work, they have still got a $\frac{3}{4}$ finished piece of written work – something that seems as if it could be pretty good. Written work that seems so much better than what they used to pass off as homework in a previous class after twenty minutes’ quick effort while chatting on Skype. *How did that happen?* They are happy. The teacher feels a weight lifting from their shoulders.

7. Writing

I give the students this last activity to do at home, as homework, but you could do it in class with them as a supervised quiet writing activity. The students take their third draft (corrected and improved) version of the text and write a final fourth draft on their own. The final draft is then handed in to the teacher and it is marked according to your normal standards for marking written work; after marking you give individual feedback to each student. There will of course still be some errors for you to correct, but the

overall standard of work should be much higher than you have previously had any right to expect from that particular student, thanks to the process of revision and the much greater level of engagement and thought that has gone into it. Of course the teacher should also push for the student to improve things like handwriting and the overall presentation of their work, as well as the content. In this process a very useful (and highly desirable, from the DOS's or language school owner's point of view) paper trail is created, showing the improvement of a student's work from its genesis as a handful of vocabulary words, through the first draft created by the whole group, the second, group-corrected draft, and the third draft (which you could get from the students if you wanted to and photocopy it for their individual files), until you finally arrive at a much more ambitious and vastly improved individual fourth draft. Meanwhile the students have been learning about how to produce a better piece of written work; not by reading a course book, but through speaking, listening, group work, pair work – and above all by *thinking* for themselves. This method really does make students think. Furthermore, they will be able to apply the techniques that they are learning by doing this process when they study again in the future.

In summary then, your students have worked hard for several hours, doing varied and enjoyable, achievable tasks; by now they rightly feel that they own their text, which makes the whole process more interesting and real to them, rather than just having read a text from another two-page spread in “the book”. Meanwhile, you the teacher have had to stay focused, but it hasn't been difficult because you have been genuinely interested in the journey that the students have been taking throughout the process. Their work and their activities based upon it has been wholly original and new – and can never be replicated. It is a one-time only process! Next time, the initial vocabulary, then text will yield something completely different. What is more, you couldn't have predicted where the students' imaginations would take the process from the opening moments of the lesson. Each lesson will be different each time, while the process remains fixed. The students have done absolutely everything themselves – with your guidance. Which is why this method is called “*You Are The Course Book*”.

Homework

Of course, students should do homework. For all I care they can do most of the course book that they've already bought as homework. I would estimate that 80% of any

leading ESL course book can be done by a student on their own in the privacy of their own home – since it is mainly reading comprehensions, listening comprehensions, and grammar exercises – so let them do it there. If you don't believe me about the 80%, maybe check your favourite course book for yourself. Or you could give the students some reading to do, and set some questions on it – or get them to write their own questions – or print out some worksheets for them to do (on englishbanana.com there are hundreds of free worksheets to download) on the topic of something from the lesson, e.g. the grammar point, or you could photocopy something else for them, or give them any other kind of task. This will feed into what they bring to the classroom next time. It may be that you will give them something to do which is part of the process, like doing the grammar, spelling, punctuation, and sense corrections of the first draft (Stage 2.2 – Corrections). Then you could check the answers with the whole group at the beginning of the next lesson, when it is time for homework to be checked in class.

Here are some notes that are higgledy-piggledy and really need writing up in a better way than I can manage now, as I write this letter, but I hope that they will support what I'm saying in some way:

- The main point is that when the teacher is engaged, the students are more likely to be engaged. Busy teacher = busy students; bored, passive teacher = bored, passive students. They take their cue from you.
- This method really does fill up the time! It answers the two all-important questions without the need for a course book: “How can I fill the lesson time?” Follow the 7 stages of this process. “What do my students need to learn?” You work on the particular language problems that they demonstrate during the lesson. Students focus on their errors (and those of their peers), rather than following a fixed syllabus in a course book.
- Students get used to helping and correcting one another's errors, rather than competing with one another.
- If this process is repeated regularly, e.g. ten times during a 40-hour course, the students will inevitably try to better their previous work, while almost automatically taking on board key elements of the process, such as how to make question forms, and how to find stress in a sentence.

- As I said before, during this process the students have to produce four separate drafts of the same piece of written work, which creates a fascinating paper trail. Some or all of those documents can be filed – either in a group folder or individual folders – and referred back to, in order to examine the progress of the group and the individual.
- What’s more, this kind of draft work is priceless for successive groups of students, because previous drafts can be used in other classes or given as homework to demonstrate errors and error-correction. As time goes on, corrected drafts can form the basis of gap-fill material in classes with other students.
- It’s a fun and fast-moving process. I believe that students enjoy this method because they do all the work. They are active and therefore time passes by quickly, but as they reflect on their work they realise that they have learned a lot.
- You will need to keep track of where each group or individual student is, so that at the start of the next lesson you can pick up from where you left off. You could use a Progress Tracker like the one I have included here. (See “*Progress Tracker*”.)
- There need be no distractions from technology, but if you do want to use it, and you have it, e.g. a laptop and printer, or a laptop and projector, or an electronic whiteboard, you can use it. The point is, though, that *you don’t need it*.
- Students are given licence by the teacher to use their imaginations – which they’ve all got. This might come as a surprise to many students when you first call upon them to unlock their creativity! And yet they are just waiting to be asked. The course book doesn’t really ask, because the course book supplies everything. It is a “comprehensive solution” and is even marketed as that. It takes away the role of creating the learning materials from the students and the teacher, and makes them dependent upon it – making more money for already-rich business people. Better to let the students produce or find their own learning material, and save the money they would have spent on course books for something else, e.g. class trips.
- The teacher grows in knowledge and confidence, e.g. in handling grammar. The teacher is able to present and must be on their toes when it comes to verb forms, and throughout the lesson as students come up against language problems, e.g.

in the free practice activity. But keeping on your toes means that you are not playing with your phone, or watching the second hand progress slowly around the clock on the wall.

- A really interesting side benefit is that you as the teacher get to find out what preoccupies your students – what they are thinking about. Their concerns will inevitably surface in the text that they produce, when their imaginations are given free rein, e.g. I had a group of weak-Elementary-level Saudi students once who, completely unprompted, produced a first draft text concerning an evil dictator and a subsequent revolution – on the moon. Yes, I said a *weak-elementary-level* group!

Are there any drawbacks to this method?

I'm not saying that this is completely perfect. I'm going to continue working on it. But I think this process is a pretty good starting point. It allows me to teach in the classroom without a course book – without getting bored. I can already hear some of your objections, of course. "What about the parents. They won't like it. They're paying for the course," and so on. But isn't it enough to just trust your teachers? If you don't trust them, why did you hire them? Our certificates didn't print themselves, you know! We had to prove that we were able to teach when we got our CELTA or Trinity Cert. TESOL certificate, or whatever we have got. If you don't think that we can teach without a course book, you shouldn't be paying us – in my opinion. "What if the students don't like it?" Well they don't like the course book now. I'm sure most of them don't. But the majority tend to trust the course book/ exam format as blindly as you do. Let's show them a different way. Couldn't we even try it so that one 90-minute session a week we do the course book, and the other 90-minute session we do it my way? Even just for ten weeks? And then you could see the work they produce; and gather testimonials from the students and the parents – and the teachers – and see what you think. You might change your mind. I know I'm suggesting something new, but we can't go on like we are now. For example, now I don't want to work for you any more. (Yet I still hold you in high regard.)

"What if the students just mess about in class?" Well, if they do that at the moment we have a behaviour policy that they had to sign when they started that should cover it, don't we? We just use that. We do what we normally do when they misbehave. But I

think that this method will lead to less bad behaviour, since students will be more engaged. Just let me try it, please. If they throw this method back in my face, then I don't really think that I can offer them – or you – anything better at the moment. But anyway, students tend to like this process, because they are working on their mistakes, and improving. It feels relevant to them. How many lessons do students sit through and they know it all already? What is the point of being there? Or they're bored of the reading and endless matching activities and they've got their heads on the desks – falling asleep! Couldn't we try a different way? "But teachers must be trained. With your way, they must be much more adept at teaching grammar and pronunciation." Yes, I would agree with you there. Let's have better teacher training – *ongoing* teacher training! How many teachers know how to write phonetically and show the students what the different sounds are in a word? How many teachers are confident in presenting present perfect form – really know it? Doing this method they would quickly learn how to do all of this, and each time the process was repeated they would gain in confidence, but it wouldn't become boring – I don't think – because each time the students would make it different by their input – each text and each process would be wholly original and unique.

I'm going to stop now because I know I have whittled on and on and you are probably just about sick of reading this now. I'm going to stop, but I will write to you again – a bit more later on about how this method can be adapted – another version. Another mode. Mode 2. Up to now I have written about the "hardcore", "classic", or "extreme" version of this process. Mode 1 – You Are The Course Book. But there are other – perhaps more *grounded* – modes that I have identified, which I'm happy to describe to you. And I will show you, M., how we could use this method together with a syllabus that we have designed ourselves – or all the teachers have designed. I would be happy to work with you on it, if you want.

So, all the best. Thanks for listening.

As ever, your friend,

Matt

28th April 2012

From: Matt Purland

ul. XXXXX

14-100 Ostróda

Poland

To: Mrs. M. XXXXX

XXXXX School of Foreign Languages

ul. XXXXX

14-100 Ostróda

Poland

Dear M.

Hi, how are you? I will try to keep this part short because I think I've nearly told you everything, and I don't want you to get bored. I won't wait for your reply to my last letter but I will send these both together, with the supplementary notes and evidence that I'm including, because I want to get on with this missive to you and to finish it – even today finish it!

The Course Book Is All Around You

Like I said before, I have written a description of the “classic” Mode 1 process of the “You Are The Course Book” method, but there are many other possible variations with the same stages in the same order:

1. Vocabulary
2. Text
3. Grammar Point
4. Verb Forms Revision
5. Pronunciation
6. Free Practice
7. Writing

(You could even change the order, but I would recommend sticking with this way for now.) Have a look at the material I have included in this pack – the lists of activities that you could do at each stage, which start here: “*Vocabulary Activities*”. So, teachers (or students) choose one activity from each list and do them in the order given above. You could use a variety of different activities at each stage so that neither of you get bored or used to one particular way. You could choose the activities randomly, or with a particular purpose, e.g. to fit the syllabus that you have designed. Everything could be chosen to suit the level, age, and needs of your students. For example, your process, which might last for four or six lesson hours in total, could look like the following (as opposed to the “classic” method explained before):

- | | |
|------------------------|---|
| 1. Vocabulary | Focus on Idioms, which are found in the text |
| 2. Text | Dictation (of the text, or the target vocab, i.e. the idioms)
– Student to Student |
| 3. Grammar Point | Whatever you have chosen, which is demonstrated in the text |
| 4. Verb Forms Revision | Sentence Blocks – using tenses found in the text |
| 5. Pronunciation | Connected Sentence Cards – with sentences from the text |
| 6. Free Practice | Discussion Questions – about the topic in the text |
| 7. Writing | Write a formal letter connected with the text |

You can see that this version of the process is not based on the students creating a text, but rather the text comes from outside of the classroom – and from a free source. You don’t have to pay royalties to use newspaper articles, or a text from online, or song lyrics, or poems, or a letter from your bank manager (realia) in your own classroom. You are not going to publish it, but simply use it locally with your students. That’s why this variation is called: “The Course Book Is All Around You”. There’s no need to buy a course book with its expensive texts, because you can get fresher, more relevant, more interesting texts for nothing. And you could tie this process into a written syllabus. Decide how long you want to spend at each stage and then work out how many lessons you will need to get through one full process. I have included a “*Lesson Planner*” for Mode 2, which shows an imagined block of four lessons for the whole process. As you know, 90 minutes is equal to two lesson hours, so this whole process lasts for 180 minutes. In the first 90 minutes we would aim to do the following stages:

1. Vocabulary
2. Text
3. Grammar Point
4. Verb Forms Revision

and in the second 90 minutes we would complete the rest:

5. Pronunciation
6. Free Practice
7. Writing

In the second block of time, there are fewer activities because Free Practice gets more time. So with Mode 2 the teacher needs to be more disciplined and try to get through everything in 4 x 45 minute classes, including homework and class revision at the top of each 90 minute block and setting homework at the end. Or we could just use Mode 1 – the “classic” version – where time is not an issue and each stage continues until it has run its course, or the students are getting bored; where the process can happily roll over into the next lesson. With Mode 1 you don’t have to plan or prepare anything, but you do need to keep notes using the *“Progress Tracker”* (as described above). For Mode 2, which can be a syllabus-based process, the teacher *does* need to plan the class. Usually a course book negates the need to plan a class, and many online materials websites offer teachers paid memberships so that they can download materials and reduce or even eliminate planning time. They promise things like: “We make life easier for teachers!” and “All your planning worries will be over when you download our latest lesson plans!”, and so on. The problem with that is that when you don’t plan the lesson, but simply photocopy a worksheet or open the book at the beginning of the lesson, you don’t engage with the lesson and you end up feeling frustrated and switched off during the lesson that you should be a leading player in. With Mode 2 – the syllabus-based version – you *would* need to plan the lesson. For example, to be ready for the lesson as listed above you would need to find a text (or write one) that contained the idioms (the target vocabulary) that you wanted to teach. If you wished to practise a specific grammar point you would need to find a text that demonstrated that too, for example, if your syllabus required practice of, let’s say, conjunctions, you would choose a text that had plenty of good examples of using conjunctions. A “text” could also be a listening text – a

song, a conversation, a video from YouTube, whatever. There are millions of options – and all of them freely available to you – without subscription! Another benefit of this method is that you are choosing real texts, which can be absolutely up to date. You could be surfing the net while having breakfast – as you do – and find a fantastic article about something really interesting that would be perfect for one of your groups later on that day. You could print it out and begin to plan your lesson, within the 7-stage framework shown above, picking out target vocabulary, good sentences for sentence stress, possible discussion questions, ideas for role plays, and so on. It comes from you and the students. You Are The Course Book. By way of contrast, course book texts are usually *not* authentic texts – they have been commissioned and written specially for the book, or they are simplified versions of real texts from newspapers or magazines, and so on. They might be years out of date, or just completely culturally inappropriate for your students. Also, since you – or your students – have chosen the text, you have invested in the lesson from the start. You care about it and want it to succeed. It isn't something abstract, created by a jaded professional course book writer, hunched over a laptop in Bangkok or Vienna – turning out material for money. It can be to do with you and your students. It can be relevant. It can be realia, e.g. a bus timetable or an instruction leaflet. It doesn't matter, as long as it's a text. But we teachers know this already, don't we? It is what we are taught, in our teacher training – to use what is around us. And yet when we are let loose inside the classroom a course book is thrust into our hands and we are urged to: "Try and stick to the book!" But why do we need expensive course books when The Course Book Is All Around Us?

Here are a few notes on planning a sequence of lessons using Mode 2:

- Decide whether it has a grammar or vocabulary focus – or both
- Find a text (or some realia) that illustrates your point(s) – or write one
- Underline target vocabulary words and phrases that are likely to be new for your students, and which are interesting in terms of pronunciation – e.g. sounds and spelling are very different
- Prepare an activity: e.g. create a gap-fill version of the text, or prepare a dictation with a few changed words, or write some comprehension questions, etc.

- Isolate one or more sentence that gives a good example of sentence stress and/or connected speech
- Prepare a free practice activity: e.g. devise a situation for a role play, or debate, or a set of discussion questions
- Think of an appropriate kind of text that students could write – that will fit the topic of the lesson text
- Keep an eye on the clock (but not clock-watching!) – keep the pace fast-moving and try to stick to your pre-arranged timings for each stage; but don't become a slave to your lesson plan
- The format is: seven stages to the process, each with many different potential activities; the stages can be optional; you don't have to do them all in each lesson, or in the same order – it depends on the level and length of the lesson – it depends on the teacher and the needs of your students; it would be good to vary the activities each time you do the process, e.g. if your students love doing role plays, don't let them do role plays each time, but introduce them to other, perhaps more challenging activities
- Make time for teachers within the school to be able to share with one another what they have done and how it went – what worked and what really bombed. That's just sharing best practice. It's obvious to do it, but how often do we sit down as a group of teachers and talk about our teaching practice?

Assessment Methods

“What about assessment,” I hear you ask! Well, I believe that students using either of these processes – or a mix of both (e.g. one week Mode 1 – “classic” mode – and one week Mode 2, with a found text) – would be able to prepare for all of the standard ELT exams using it. No course book publisher holds a copyright on the English language. Students can succeed in assessment by using a variety of methods. It doesn't have to mean using the course book *du jour*. Of course you should be careful to ensure that students have a steady diet of “input” in the form of reading and listening from a wide range of sources, but reading is a solitary activity and can be done as homework. Listening is another activity that we can do really well on our own. Nobody can jump inside our head and comprehend and unpack something that we read or hear. Only we can do that – so why do it in class time, when we've got a precious opportunity to work

together? Homework is important in this process. I am simply arguing that time in the class should be spent doing things that can't be done as homework, i.e. speaking practice, group work, pair work, and above all enjoying and appreciating the teaching of their qualified, enthusiastic, and wonderful teacher! (By the way, we could still run all of the social and cultural activities that the students have and enjoy now. The increased level of pair and group work in this new method will really help to bring them closer together as classmates – rather than all the boring reading and answering homework-style questions that they have to do now because we're following the course book.)

I would suggest that we use the following assessment methods with either of the above processes (either YATCB or TCBI AAY – I know you love acronyms, M.):

- Before each class do 10 minutes revision of the previous class
- Regular tests, e.g. grammar, vocabulary, speaking, listening, pronunciation, etc.
- Regular homework (discussed above)
- End of “unit” tests, e.g. after 12 hours of study
- Regular one to one tutorials with the teacher
- End of course assessment, including grammar, vocabulary, speaking, listening, pronunciation, etc. (We can put these tests together ourselves. I'll help you do it!)

Commando Mode

Another form of the original YATCB method is the Commando Approach, which can be used by teachers who *have to* use a course book in their lessons – who have no choice. Like at your school at the moment! We are like slaves, following a course book that neither we nor the students like or believe in. So, Commando Approach involves working undercover and doing the YATCB process but using the course book as the raw material. For example, we follow the usual outline (or a variation of it):

1. Vocabulary
2. Text
3. Grammar Point
4. Verb Forms Revision

5. Pronunciation
6. Free Practice
7. Writing

but before the lesson the teacher has examined the two-page spread that they have to work through, and identified points like the target vocabulary, the text, the main grammar point, as well as a few sentences from the text that could be suitable for pronunciation practice. The idea is to do everything that is in the YATCB process, e.g. find the stress and vowel sounds of the vocabulary words; help the students to “discover” the text in an interactive way, rather than just reading it out loud or to themselves (it could be done as a pair dictation, for example); practise verb forms with the 8 questions technique, or with sentence blocks, and work out the sentence stress and connected speech, followed by a free practice activity from the list, and a writing task – all based on the topic of what’s in the spread. You could do some (or all) of the activities from the actual spread as well, but do them really quickly and make time for activities from the YATCB lists of activities. This gives the impression to the students (and directors of studies) that you have covered the whole spread, which you have in a way, but really you have been focused on conducting a YATCB lesson based on the material in the course book. It may be that you can do most or all of the activities in the course book, or just set some of them for homework. This way everything is covered, but you leave the classroom *having done more* than you would have done if you had only covered the 2-page spread – which usually does not provide enough material for a 90-minute class anyway. You feel more fulfilled, and so do the students, who realise that they have learned more than normal. Commando Mode is really a kind of compromise and I don’t recommend it, but it’s better than the alternative (just following the course book) and could be useful for honing your skills using YATCB activities and working methods, while slugging it out in a “sausage factory”-type role, where you have to do what you’re told and work your way through a book which you all believe to be unsatisfactory and which does not meet the needs of your students.

Using Existing Talk a Lot Materials

“What about the Talk a Lot books and all the other wonderful materials that you have already written, Matt?” I hear you asking. Well, it might have crossed your mind. You are a lovely, thoughtful person, after all. ☺ The point is that I don’t have to write any

more learning materials – and I don’t want to. I feel like I’m off the hook! Maybe I have just written myself out after writing nine course books, hundreds of different worksheets, and spending ten years doing the englishbanana.com website. Maybe I’ve exhausted everything. But it isn’t that. More to the point is that:

You Are The Course Book
and
The Course Book As All Around You

Why should I write another line when my students can do a better job at creating their own learning material than I can? How can I – or any materials writer, for that matter – compete with that fact? I can’t win out against my students’ imaginations. (Remember the Saudi students’ revolution on the moon?) Even the weakest student will be able to produce something interesting if you encourage and guide them; if you help them to get it out, to express themselves. And in Mode 2 – TCBIAAY – well, there is so much fresh and exciting material out there, which is freely available, that I can’t and don’t want to compete. I’d far rather use a real, authentic example of English than something I have specifically written for the classroom. Wouldn’t you? And I can’t write a better text than one of Shakespeare’s sonnets; I can’t write something as interesting or original as a well-written news story from an online newspaper’s website – it can be hot off the press on the day that I use it in class! So I’ve stopped trying to write more worksheets and English resource books. I don’t *need* to any more.

But yes, of course, you could still use the existing Talk a Lot materials in the classroom. Maybe you will want to use them – especially Elementary Book 1 – with real zero beginners or students who can produce very little English. Yes, they need to learn the basic vocabulary sets, like “clothes” and “food and drink”, which is what that book is useful for teaching. But you should still try to use this new method with low-level learners. Try it – you might be surprised at what they can come up with. You might have to guide them more than elementary and pre-intermediate level students, but follow the process with them and see what happens. And of course you can still use any of the materials I wrote for englishbanana.com – or materials from any other source, including course books, text books, worksheets, and so on – but as part of the 7-stage process (or for homework). For example, if I know I’m teaching past perfect tense (because it’s on

the syllabus that we've agreed on) and I've got a text which has a few instances of this, I might reach for a favourite grammar book and use some of the well thought-out activities and sample sentences from that. I'm not advocating getting rid of all books and the sum of human knowledge! I'm just saying that with Mode 1 of this process, you don't need any materials or resources. Just you and your students will be enough. Why not try it? Try it and see what I mean. While it might initially take some courage on the part of teachers and language school owners to ditch the course book, I hope you can see – after reading my long letters and the accompanying notes – how the YATCB method is just so much fresher and, well, healthy than the course book. We can compare the two ways like this: the course book is stodgy fast food or a processed TV dinner, full of additives (to make it palatable) and unnecessary ingredients, while the YATCB method is fine cuisine that you and your students have individually hand-prepared on the day, using only fresh ingredients. The processed food of the course book *can* fulfil a pressing hunger, but it doesn't satisfy you in the long run, because it's designed, like salty and sweet junk food, only to make you want to consume more. What's more – the people consuming this rubbish never learn to cook properly for themselves.

After that hastily constructed metaphor I'm going to go. But before I sign off (I have to pop to the post office now and then prepare my lessons for tomorrow) I wanted to just remind you that I've already written copious instructions on how to use the activities in the *Activity Lists*. Have a look at *Talk a Lot Elementary Handbook* or *Talk a Lot Intermediate Book 1* and you'll find comprehensive notes and instructions and resources. For example, if you haven't got a clue how to get your students building sentence blocks, you'll find everything you need to know to get them started from Section B P.2.1 of *Talk a Lot Elementary Handbook*. I'm not going to include all of that information again here – this should be a slim volume compared to those books! We've talked before about me doing a Talk a Lot Foundation Course with the students at your school. I would really recommend doing one of those before starting a YATCB course. It would be good for the other teachers at your school to do it as students first, before they teach it to their students. I know that none of them have the first idea about how native speakers use connected speech in a sentence, for example (let alone how to teach it). I'm not being funny when I say this, but how can we expect our students to learn to speak English well when we the teachers haven't got a clue what stress and connected speech are – and what we do when we speak. I'm sure most of the teachers at your school

wouldn't even know what a Schwa sound was if it hit them over the head and stole their mobile phone, never mind a glottal stop! (If I'm wrong, by the way, please prove me wrong! I'd be happy for you to do so!) Anyway, please let me run a pronunciation course (Talk a Lot Foundation Course) for the teachers here at your wonderful school, and then we can roll it out to all the groups of students. What do you think? Then we'll do lessons properly, without a course book, with YATCB and/or TCBIAAY, and I'll take you up on your kind offer to work with you again next year, and every year – happily.

Thank you, M., for reading this, and not just binning it. (I assume you have read it all through thoroughly. Several times. I'm joking now!) I sincerely mean it – you know, you are the best, the finest language school owner I have ever met – and a quite brilliant person too! I would love to work with you.

See you soon, with love from,

Matt

Supporting Material

Outline of Mode 1 and Mode 2

Mode 1: You Are The Course Book

- One process; it lasts as long as it takes; time and activities roll over into new lessons
 - 1. Vocabulary – “Interesting and random!”
 - stress
 - vowel sounds
 - other interesting features
 - 2. Text
 - 2.1 First Draft – Getting the Initial Ideas (whole group)
 - 2.2 Second Draft – Corrections (whole group)
 - Grammar
 - Spelling
 - Punctuation
 - Sense
 - 2.3 Third Draft – Improvements (pairs or small groups)
 - Title
 - Vocabulary
 - Sentence Structure
 - People
 - Motivations
 - Actions
 - Results
 - Details
 - 3. Grammar Point
 - 4. Verb Forms Revision
 - 8 Questions, e.g. What, Where, When, Who, Why, Which, How, and Auxiliary Verbs
 - Sentence Blocks
 - Verb Forms Revision Test
 - 5. Pronunciation
 - Sentence Stress
 - Connected Speech
 - 6. Free Practice
 - Choose an activity from the list on P.65
 - 7. Writing
 - 2.4 Final Draft (individual)
-

Mode 2: The Course Book Is All Around You

- Can be fixed to an agreed syllabus and timetable, e.g. 4 lesson hours for the whole process
- Choose a text that illustrates a particular grammar or vocabulary point, or both – or any teaching point
- Choose an activity for each stage from the activity lists and work through them in this order:
 1. Vocabulary
 2. Text
 3. Grammar Point
 4. Verb Forms Revision

(The process could be split in the middle after Stage 4)

 5. Pronunciation
 6. Free Practice
 7. Writing

Progress Tracker

Teacher: _____ Date: _____

Date:	Group/Individual:	Level:	Time:	Stages Completed:	Homework:

Example:

Date:	Group/Individual:	Level:	Time:	Stages Completed:	Homework:
<i>Wed 25.04</i>	<i>Piotr</i>	<i>Pre-Int</i>	<i>90 mins</i>	<i>1, 2.1, 2.2, 3, 4, 5</i>	<i>Writing: 2.3 (write third draft)</i>
<i>Fri 27.04</i>	<i>Foresters Group</i>	<i>Elementary</i>	<i>90 mins</i>	<i>1, 2.1, 2.2, 3</i>	<i>Vocab Test – Food and Drink</i>

Mode 2 – Lesson Planner

Class: _____ Level: _____

Lesson A Week: _____ Date: _____ Teacher: _____

Mins: 10	Revision of previous lesson / homework review / test
20	Vocabulary Activity: _____
20	Text Title: _____ Activity: _____
20	Grammar Point _____
20	Verb Forms Revision Activity: _____
<i>Total: 90</i>	Homework <i>e.g. exercises related to the lesson</i>

Lesson B Week: _____ Date: _____ Teacher: _____

Mins: 10	Revision of previous lesson / homework review / test
20	Pronunciation Activity: _____
40	Free Practice Activity: _____
20	Writing Activity: _____
<i>Total: 90</i>	Homework <i>e.g. finish the writing task; and/or exercises related to the lesson</i>

Vocabulary Activities

(These notes apply if you are following **Mode 2: The Course Book Is All Around You**. For **Mode 1: You Are The Course Book** follow the example given earlier in the book.)

(Note: you can find detailed instructions on how to prepare and run many of these activities in the following publications, which are both free downloads from englishbanana.com: Talk a Lot Elementary Handbook and Talk a Lot Intermediate Book 1.)

Core Activities: to be done with the vocabulary words and phrases in each lesson:

1. Write 10-20 vocabulary words and phrases on the board (the target vocabulary); the number and type will depend on the level of your group
2. Ask students if there are any new words that they don't know; they check the meaning of each word or phrase in their dictionaries
3. Students write them down in their notebooks
4. Students note how many syllables there are in each word or phrase, the word stress, and write down the stressed vowel sounds (using the NEA)
5. Note any differences between spelling and sounds, e.g. silent letters, elision, etc.
6. Discuss the class of each word and phrase, e.g. noun, main verb, adverb, idiom, etc.

Optional Activities: choose one or more per lesson, but vary them from lesson to lesson:

1. Classic Talk a Lot Vocabulary lesson:
 - describe a word or phrase for us to guess
 - put them into alphabetical order
 - memory: remember the words and phrases when they are removed
 - put the words into meaningful categories
 - compare and contrast two different items; compare two similar items
 - draw a picture of a word or phrase for us to guess
 - draw the shape of a word or phrase for us to guess
 - visualisations (see *Talk a Lot Elementary Book 3*)
2. Play the Big Word Game
3. Play Talk a Lot Bingo
4. Study dialects and accents of native English speakers (audio or video)
5. Study features of non-literal speech, e.g. metaphor, allusion, etc.
6. Practise making glottal stops
7. Practise making the Schwa sound
8. Focus on idioms
9. Work with the NEA, e.g. translate to and from the NEA
10. Focus on phrasal verbs, e.g. practise with the phrasal verbs dice game or activity cards
11. Focus on slang in English

Work that the students should do in their own time (homework):

- Learn the New English Alphabet (NEA) so that they can write words and sentences phonetically
- Learn lists of common idioms, phrasal verbs, and slang expressions
- Learn vocabulary sets, e.g. using flashcards
- Make notes about what they are learning and keep a vocabulary notebook

Text Activities

*(These notes apply if you are following **Mode 2: The Course Book Is All Around You**. For **Mode 1: You Are The Course Book** follow the example given earlier in the book.)*

(Note: you can find detailed instructions on how to prepare and run many of these activities in the following publications, which are both free downloads from englishbanana.com: Talk a Lot Elementary Handbook and Talk a Lot Intermediate Book 1.)

Everything flows from the text that is chosen by the teacher or students:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| 1. vocabulary words and phrases | selected from the text |
| 2. text | it's the text that you want to work with |
| 3. grammar point | illustrated by the text |
| 4. verb forms revision | students write questions based on the text |
| 5. pronunciation | whole or part sentences from the text are chosen and examined in terms of sentence stress and connected speech |
| 6. free practice | the activity flows out of the topic and ideas in the text |
| 7. writing | the activity is suggested by the text and the free practice activities |

Core Activities: to be done in each lesson:

- analyse the text for effectiveness of communication – suggest improvements
- analyse the text for errors – again, suggest improvements

Optional Activities: choose one or more per lesson, but vary them from lesson to lesson:

1. Audio lesson – listen and make notes, or listen for specific information
2. Comprehension questions / True, False, or Unknown?
3. Dictation – student to student
4. Dictation – teacher to students
5. Dictation – teacher to students, but the teacher chooses a set number of words/phrases and changes them; students have to underline the changed words/phrases and write down the new ones
6. Gap-fill with the target vocabulary
7. Information exchange
8. Puzzle pieces – cut up the text into a set number of different pieces and mix them up; students have to put them into the correct order
9. Reading race
10. Video lesson – watch and make notes, or watch for specific information

General Notes:

- The text could be chosen by the teacher or the students
- The text could be... printed text, audio, video, or realia
- The text is chosen to illustrate the target vocabulary that you want to teach, or the grammar point, or both. Or any teaching point
- The text should be interesting to the students and, where possible, an example of real English in use, e.g. from a newspaper, magazine, book, or realia
- Using a fresh, relevant text will make the lesson more interesting for teacher and students, rather than having to use the same old course book lesson after lesson
- The way of finding or approaching the text could be different for students each time they do this process, e.g. they could find the text by way of listening, watching, teacher dictation, pair dictation, reading race, cut-up pieces, or by gap-fill with the target vocabulary, and so on
- The text can be original material, i.e. copyright material, because it's only for your classroom use and will not be published or distributed further

Grammar Point Activities

*(These notes apply if you are following **Mode 2: The Course Book Is All Around You**. For **Mode 1: You Are The Course Book** follow the example given earlier in the book.)*

General Notes:

- Each process should have a grammar point, relevant to the needs of your students at that time
- The grammar point should be illustrated by the text
- The teacher could do a short presentation of the grammar point, then students have to find examples in the text. After that, if desired, the students could use an exercise from a worksheet or part of a grammar book to practise the point further; or write their own example sentences
- The grammar points could be in a particular order as determined by your own pre-written course syllabus, e.g. present simple is introduced before present continuous, and so on
- At this stage in the process you could run a short general grammar quiz based on the text, e.g. find four prepositions; an example of passive voice, etc. – whatever features of grammar the text demonstrates. The students write down the answers, or write on the board in a competition with two teams; or the teacher asks individual students for their answers

The grammar point is part of your syllabus for the course. Here is an example of a grammar syllabus for Elementary level, which could be worked through in order. (Of course, your own syllabus may be more suitable!)

Elementary Level – Grammar Syllabus – 10-Week Course:

- Week 1. learn word classes, e.g. nouns, main verbs, auxiliary verbs, adjectives, etc.
- Week 2. present simple vs. present continuous
- Week 3. articles and determiners
- Week 4. nouns 1: countable and uncountable
- Week 5. nouns 2: plural forms, this/that/these/those, quantity words, and possessive forms
- Week 6. past simple vs. present perfect
- Week 7. modal forms
- Week 8. telling the time
- Week 9. future with 'will' and 'going to'
- Week 10. first conditional

Work that the students should do in their own time (homework):

- Learn to write and pronounce the English alphabet
- Practise any grammar that they do not feel confident with by completing grammar exercises in course books, on worksheets, on CD-ROMs, and on websites

Verb Forms Revision Activities

(These notes apply to both modes – **Mode 1: You Are The Course Book** and **Mode 2: The Course Book Is All Around You.**)

(Note: you can find detailed instructions on how to run sentence block activities in the following publications, which are both free downloads from englishbanana.com: Talk a Lot Elementary Handbook and Talk a Lot Intermediate Book 1.)

These activities will be the same during both modes. Only the text will be different, i.e. in Mode 1 it will be created by the students, while in Mode 2 it will be a found text that has been chosen by either the teacher or the students. The aim is to focus on particular verb forms – which appear in the text and/or what students most need to practise at that time. For example, if students are having a hard time with present perfect form, this stage should feature plenty of practise of that form, as well as others that are proving problematic.

The teacher or the students can choose from three different activities, which should be rotated or varied each time you do the process, so that you don't get bored. (See "*My Letters to M.*" for more details about how to run them):

1. 8 Questions – Students have to write/make eight questions based on the text (where the answer is in the text) using seven question words (what, where, when, who, why, which, how) as well as an auxiliary verb to make a yes/no question, e.g. "did" or "has". They ask and answer questions, then change partners and repeat the activity
2. Sentence Blocks – normal sentence block method using sentences from the text and focusing on verb forms that you most want to practise. Students could make the blocks up to line 5 (easier way) in lower-level groups, and up to line 7 (full form) in higher-level groups
3. Verb Forms Revision Test – using the blank template (over the page), so that you can verify your students' knowledge and understanding. Students practise a set number of verb forms, e.g. four, which they are studying or have been studying. For example, at Elementary level I might choose: Present Simple, Present Continuous (and draw out the differences) and Past Simple and Present Perfect (and again, draw out the differences). Repeat this often, until the students *just know it*. Give marks out of twenty for four verb forms. I tend to be a hard marker with this test and only give a mark for a completely correct sentence. It doesn't matter whether the error is connected with the verb form or something else, e.g. punctuation. The point is that I want the students to prove that they can write a complete correct sentence (positive, negative, or question form) using a given verb form. Even a missing capital letter at the beginning or full stop at the end means no mark. No half marks! Be hard but fair!

Verb Forms Revision Test

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____ Teacher: _____

Verb Form (Tense):	Time:	Auxiliary Verb(s):	Example Sentences:
			+
			-
			? / 5
			+
			-
			? / 5
			+
			-
			? / 5
			+
			-
			? / 5

Total: / 20

Verb Forms Revision Test – Sample Answers

Verb Form (Tense):	Time:	Auxiliary Verb(s):	Example Sentences:*
present simple	regular time	do / does	+ I like chips. - I do not like chips. ? Do you like chips?
present continuous	now <i>or</i> future (with time phrase, e.g. "at 8pm")	am / is / are	+ I am reading a book. - I am not reading a book. ? Are you reading a book?
past simple	finished time in the past, e.g. last week	did	+ I met my friend. - I did not meet my friend. ? Did you meet your friend?
past continuous	finished time in the past, e.g. last week	was / were	+ I was driving for two hours. - I was not driving for two hours. ? Were you driving for two hours?
present perfect	unfinished time, e.g. this week	have / has	+ I have finished my breakfast. - I have not finished my breakfast. ? Have you finished your breakfast?
present perfect continuous	unfinished time, e.g. this week	have / has + been	+ I have been playing football. - I have not been playing football. ? Have you been playing football?
past perfect	time before another past action	had	+ I had been to Italy before. - I had not been to Italy before. ? Had you been to Italy before?
modal forms	various times	modal auxiliary verbs	+ I can swim. - I cannot swim. ? Can you swim?
future with 'will'	immediate future <i>or</i> predicted future	will	+ I will pay for lunch. - I will not pay for lunch. ? Will you pay for lunch?
future with 'going to'	planned future	am / is / are + going to	+ I am going to join a gym. - I am not going to join a gym. ? Are you going to join a gym?

*Contractions are also acceptable, e.g. 'I don't like chips', 'I'm reading a book', 'I've finished my breakfast', etc.

Pronunciation Activities

(These notes apply if you are following **Mode 2: The Course Book Is All Around You**. For **Mode 1: You Are The Course Book** follow the example given earlier in the book.)

(Note: you can find detailed instructions on how to prepare and run many of these activities in the following publications, which are free downloads from englishbanana.com: Talk a Lot Elementary Handbook, Talk a Lot Intermediate Book 1, and – in particular – Talk a Lot Foundation Course.)

Core Activities: to be done in each lesson:

- You or the students choose a sentence from the text or make one up. You could build a sentence by eliciting: Person/Thing/Place/Time
- Examine the meaning of the sentence
- Identify content and function words
- Find the stressed syllable on each content word
- Identify the vowel sound on the stressed syllable – you’ve found the sound spine (see *Talk a Lot Foundation Course* for more details)
- Examine sound connections between syllables

Optional Activities: choose one or more per lesson, but vary them from lesson to lesson:

1. Practise with the chunking technique and focus on word order (see next page for more about chunking)
2. Practise with connected sentence cards
3. Practise with a connected speech template
4. Plan a lesson about a specific part of this method, e.g. linking vv sound connections
5. Practise making cut-up NEA sentences (or use pre-made sentence cards)
6. Learn the different features of connected speech, e.g. elision, assimilation, etc.
7. Study the NEA – New English Alphabet
8. Study the IPA – International Phonetic Alphabet, which is used in many dictionaries
9. Learn about the importance of suffixes and compound nouns in pronunciation
10. Practise with Practice Page 1 from *Talk a Lot Foundation Course*
11. Examine vowel sounds and learn about how they have multiple spellings; highlight the disparity between spelling and sounds in English
12. Focus on long vowel sounds: LEARN TO LOVE LONG VOWEL SOUNDS! Look at a sentence; find all the vowel sounds; replace the long vowel sounds with a short equivalent, e.g. “I like eating sweets!”, which should be pronounced: “Ai Lai Kee ting Sweets”, would become “A La Ki ting Swits!” Explain how this is how many students speak when they don’t use long vowel sounds – perhaps because they don’t exist in their first language

Work that the students should do in their own time (homework):

- Learn the NEA and the IPA
- Practice with the different methods of examining a sentence:
 - Connected sentence cards
 - Connected speech template
 - Practice Page 1 (from *Talk a Lot Foundation Course*)
 - Chunking method, where you break down a sentence into three or four phrases and students examine each phrase for a variety of features, including type of word, verb form, sentence stress (draw the stress pattern of a phrase), stressed vowel sounds, other sounds (e.g. Schwa sounds), sound connections, features of connected speech (e.g. glottal stops), weak forms (e.g. contractions), New English Alphabet (translate the phrase into the NEA), and so on. For example, the sentence:

She is planning to have a facelift in August.

could be broken down into the following phrases (or chunks):

she is planning to have a facelift in August

Don't put a capital letter at the beginning or a full stop at the end, as that would help the students too much!

Or you could mix up the different chunks and students have to put them back in order, e.g.

to have in August she is planning a facelift

You could do the same thing with a number of different sentences, which are all mixed up together. This is great for helping students to practise word order in a sentence, using the S.V.O.P.T order: subject, verb, object, place, and time.

Or you could present a sentence split up into phrases, then take away one phrase and ask students to fill the gap with their own phrase which could fit there, then take away more phrases from the sentence; or you take away one or more phrase and the students have to remember what was there... and so on.

she is planning to have _____ in August

What could fill the gap? "a holiday", "a meeting with her boss", "a break", and so on. As students use their imaginations, this activity helps them to practise word order, sentence structure, and the role of function words in a sentence, for example prepositions and articles – as well as stress, connected speech and everything else listed above.

Free Practice Activities

(These notes apply to both modes – **Mode 1: You Are The Course Book** and **Mode 2: The Course Book Is All Around You.**)

(Note: you can find detailed instructions on how to prepare and run many of these activities in the following publications, which are both free downloads from englishbanana.com: *Talk a Lot Elementary Handbook* and *Talk a Lot Intermediate Book 1*.)

There are no core activities – free practice will be different each time. Students work together in pairs or small groups. You should ensure that everybody has a partner or is in a group, and that everybody is participating.

Activities: choose one or more per lesson, but vary them from lesson to lesson. Note the order in this list is completely arbitrary. It doesn't matter what order you do them in your syllabus (although Activity #5 – Icebreakers would be good in the opening lesson), but remember not to repeat the same activity too often – variety is the spice of life!

1. Agree or disagree?
2. Class debate
3. Describing and comparing pictures
4. Discussion questions
5. Fun games (icebreakers – getting to know you, e.g. the Find Somebody Who... series on englishbanana.com)
6. Prepare and give a presentation – small groups
7. Prepare and give a presentation – individual
8. Questionnaire
9. Devise a role play or dialogue
10. Show and tell – bring something with you to the class and talk about it
11. What Would You Do? (See *Talk a Lot Intermediate Book 1* for full details)
12. Picture stories: put a group of pre-prepared pictures (e.g. eight or nine pictures) in order to tell a story with a given tense; or students have to draw their own stories in several different parts, then give it to another who has to put it into order and tell the story in their own words. (You could also do this activity as part of Verb Forms Revision)

Alternatively, you could devise your own free practice activity – or grab one from a resource book.

In general, during free practice activities, the teacher should be walking around each group or pair, listening, taking notes, and giving invaluable feedback – rather than popping to the toilet, having a cup of tea, or phoning the plumber to make an appointment for the following day. This is the time when you can see all the hard work that you and your students have put into the process so far really paying off, as the students activate and use what they have been learning. For example, if you hear a mistake with a tense that you've just covered in Stage 3 or 4, then you can help the student recall what you talked about. At the end of this stage the teacher facilitates a group feedback session on the board with the whole class based on the notes he or she has made. This can be a handy form of revision and a great way to sum up* the whole

process so far, including the target vocabulary from way back at the beginning, the main grammar point, and the points the class discovered about verb forms, stress, and connected speech as well.

(*Since Stage 7 will probably be given for homework, rather than done in class.)

Write Your Own Discussion Questions

It's easy to write your own discussion questions – you or your students can do it. You don't need to be a professional ESL course book writer. The same kinds of question can occur regularly:

Typical Kinds of Question:

1. Likes and Dislikes
2. Personal Opinion
3. Personal Preference
4. Description
5. Personal Experience
6. Discussion
7. Hypothetical Situation
8. Speculation about the Future
9. Vocabulary Activator
10. Personal Ability
11. Memories / Life History
12. Imagination

Students will have to speak more if they are given follow-up questions. Some useful phrases after most questions will be: “Why?”, “Can you give me some examples?” or just simply “Please tell me more about that.” Of course, students can also make up their own supplementary questions as appropriate.

1. Likes and Dislikes:

- What is your favourite...? Why?
- What is your least favourite...? Why?
- Do you enjoy...? Why? / Why not? Give reasons and examples.

2. Personal Opinion:

- What are the advantages / disadvantages of...?
- What is the biggest problem with...?
- What is the biggest / best / nicest / strongest...? (superlative adjective) Why?
- Who is the... (superlative adjective) person you know? How did you meet them?
- Is it harder to be... than...? Why? / Why not?
- In your opinion...
- Do you believe that it is right to / that...? (ethical issue) Why? / Why not?
- Do you believe in...? (ethical issue) Why? / Why not?
- How important is x ? Why? Give reasons and examples.
- Do you think that x do/does a good job? Why? / Why not? Give reasons and examples.
- Is x as good as x ? Why? / Why not? Give reasons and examples.
- Compare... Give examples.

- What are the biggest issues regarding... (e.g. global warming) today? How can we try to solve these problems?

3. Personal Preference:

- Do you prefer x or x ? Why? Give reasons and examples.
- How do you prefer to...?
- Rank (e.g. 10 things)... in order of preference / importance.

4. Description:

- Describe...
- Tell me about...
- Tell me about somebody you know / the (superlative adjective, e.g. the most interesting) person you know. Describe their typical day, etc.
- Describe... / Imagine I'm an alien who knows nothing about life on Earth. Describe to me in as much detail as possible an everyday activity, e.g. brushing your teeth or tying up your shoelaces.
- Describe a famous / amazing / expensive / magnificent (strong adjective)...
- Describe a typical day for...
- Describe a typical... in as much detail as possible.
- Describe... (something / somebody / a place / an object / a concept, etc.) in as much detail as possible.
- Define... give examples.

5. Personal Experience:

- Have you ever...? (experience)
- Do you know anyone who...?
- What do you...?
- When do you...?
- Why do you...?
- Where do you...?
- How do you usually...?
- How often do you...?
- Do you ever...?
- Do you usually...?
- When did you last...?
- What is the best / worst / other superlative adjective... you have ever...?
- When did you last...? (experience) Why... What... How... When...? etc.
- How much money / time / effort do you usually spend on...? Why? Give reasons and examples.
- What is the easiest way to...? What is the hardest way to...? Why? / Why not? Give reasons and examples.
- How do you usually feel when...?

- Have you got...? / Would you like to get? Why? / Why not? Give reasons and examples.
- Are you happy with...? Why? / Why not? Give reasons and examples.

6. Discussion:

- Discuss... Give examples.
- Tell me about... / Talk about... for one / two / three minutes, etc. Give reasons and examples.
- Controversial statement, e.g. "_____ is _____." Discuss.
- Quotation... Discuss.

7. Hypothetical Situation:

- What would you do if...?
- How would you feel if...?
- How would you... if...?
- If you had the choice, what / where / when / who / how, etc. would you...?
- How do you think ... will be different in x years' time?
- Would you like to... one day? Why? How do you think it would feel? How would you prepare for it? If not, why not?
- How important is... to you? Why? What would you do if you couldn't have it for x days / months / years / ever again? How would you feel?
- What would life be like without...? Could you live (in a world) without...? How would life be different if...? What would you do... if you no longer had...? / ...if there were no more...?
- If money were no object...?
- If you could change one thing about... what would it be?
- If you could be any kind of x in the world (e.g. animal, food, city, etc.), what would you be? Why? Imagine a typical day. What would you do? Where would you go? Why? What would be... difficult, fun, easy, frightening, (adjective), etc.?
- If you could swap bodies (places) with x for one day, what would you do? What would be... difficult, fun, easy, frightening, (adjective), etc.?
- Would you like to be a...? Why? / Why not? Give reasons and examples.
- Would you like to get involved in...? Why? / Why not? Give reasons and examples.
- If you were prime minister or president of your country (for one day / one week / one month, etc.), what changes would you make? Why? Give reasons and examples.

8. Speculation about the Future:

- What do you think x will be like in the future? Describe it. What will be positive and negative about it? Will it be generally more positive or more negative than it is now? Why? Give reasons and examples.
- Will it ever be possible to / that...? If no, why not?

- Have you ever considered doing...? Why? When are you planning to do it? If no, why not?
- Should more be done to improve x ? Why? / Why not? Give reasons and examples. What impact would it have on...? Would you or your family be affected? How would you feel? Why?

9. Vocabulary Activator:

- How many different ways can you think of to...?
- Think of x (e.g. ten) different kinds of x and put them into (these) categories...
- Tell me x (e.g. five) ways in which x could be improved. Give reasons and examples.
- What do you think of when you hear the word x ? Tell me more.
- What x (e.g. five) words come to mind when you hear the word x ? Tell me more.

10. Personal Ability:

- Can you...? Tell me about how you learned to do it.
- Can you... (ability)? When did you first...? How did you start...? How often do you...? Why do you...? etc.
- How old were you when you first learned to...? Tell me about the learning process. What obstacles did you face? Who helped you?

11. Memories / Life History:

- What do you remember about... (e.g. a specific time in the past)
- Tell me about a time when...
- Can you remember life before...? How is it different from now? Is it better or worse now? Why? Give reasons and examples.

12. Imagination Activity:

- Invent your own... (e.g. sport, car, clothes, dessert, TV channel, etc.) Consider the following elements...

Starting basic questions:

What...?

Where...?

When...?

Who...?

Why...?

Which...?

How...?

How much...?

How many...?

How often...?

Is / are...?
Did...?
Has / have...?
Can...?
Will...?

etc.

Question Sets:

If we were to choose the best questions from this list and put them into two sets with eight questions each, they might look something like the ones below. You could use these questions to discuss any topic, from Food and Drink to Farming, and from Space Travel to Free Time. In my experience, eight questions is more than enough for an individual lesson, although of course you could use more questions or fewer – as well as your own supplementary questions. Students could use the questions as starting points for writing assignments too. You could print out the lists below and give them to students to work on in pairs or small groups during the Free Practice stage; then they swap the questions they have created with another group and discuss the new questions together. Of course, then you would have a load of ready-made questions that you could give to another class another day.

Sample Question Set 1:

1. What is your favourite / least favourite...? Why?
2. What are the advantages / disadvantages of...?
3. Describe... / Imagine I'm an alien who knows nothing about life on Earth.
Describe to me in detail an everyday activity, e.g. brushing your teeth or tying up your shoelaces.
4. Have you ever...? (experience)
5. How would you feel if...?
6. Will it ever be possible to / that...? If no, why not?
7. How many different ways can you think of to...?
8. Can you... (ability)? When did you first...? How did you start...? Why do you...?

Sample Question Set 2:

1. Do you believe that it is right to / that...? (ethical issue) Why? / Why not?
2. Rank (e.g. 10 things)... in order of preference / importance.
3. Describe a typical day for...
4. When did you last...? (experience) Why... What... How... When...? etc.
5. What would life be like without...? Could you live (in a world) without...? How would life be different if...? What would you do... if you no longer had...? / ...if there were no more...?
6. What five words come to mind when you hear the word *x*? Tell me more.
7. Tell me about a time when...
8. Invent your own... (e.g. sport, car, clothes, dessert, TV channel, etc.) Consider the following elements...

Writing Activities

*(These notes apply if you are following **Mode 2: The Course Book Is All Around You**. For **Mode 1: You Are The Course Book** follow the example given earlier in the book.)*

You could choose from these options (or your own); or just do whatever matches the text:

1. Make a **written record** of their role play or dialogue from the Free Practice stage
2. Write a **particular kind of text** (see below)
3. Write a **description**: of a place, person, activity, object, feeling, product, event, emotion, etc.
4. Write for a **particular purpose**, e.g. to thank / complain / compliment / request / inform, etc.

General Notes:

- The writing stage could be done in class, or given as homework. It should be marked by the teacher with errors clearly indicated so that students can find out where they have gone wrong, and try to learn from their mistakes next time. You could use codes to show errors, e.g.

G (grammar)

SP (spelling)

P (punctuation)

^ (something is missing)

WO (word order)

WW (wrong word)

? (doesn't make sense)

H (hard to read handwriting)

- During a course students should practise writing a variety of different kinds of text – not just a short story every time (but see below for more about basic story plots)
- The length will be dictated by the level, e.g. at elementary level 70 words could be enough, while at intermediate level students should write at least 150 words, and so on
- You should standardise writing paper and style, e.g. written work should be done using black or blue ink only, on a particular type of lined writing paper (you could use the template provided), as well as double spaced, which will give you space to write in the marking codes – i.e. in between the lines

Different kinds of text –

Text:

Examples of writing assignments that students could do:

article

newspaper, magazine, online, offline

email

formal, informal, complaint, advice, suggestion

essay

academic, magazine, newspaper (broadsheet / tabloid)

form

application form, government form

historical	document from a specific period of time or event
instructional	how to do something
leaflet / brochure	promotional, information, guidance
letter	formal, informal, thank you, invitation, good / bad news
poem	traditional, modern, sonnet, song (rock / pop / R&B / blues / folk)
promotional	advert, leaflet, brochure
recipe	starter, main course, dessert, drinks
report	business, newspaper, financial
review	book, film, TV show, exhibition, event, food, sports
script	TV, radio, film, play
short story	comedy, drama, romance, horror, action, real life, war, sci-fi, western
social network	status update, profile, tweet, messages
text message	urgent, joking, banal, informative, angry
and so on...	

Seven Plots:

If your students love writing short stories, you could add variety by encouraging them to write stories from various different genres (see above) and with different kinds of plot. It is said that there are only seven plots in literature, and your students could choose from one of these – or write a story for each plot. The seven plots are:

1. The quest
2. Voyage and return
3. Rebirth
4. Comedy
5. Tragedy
6. Overcoming the monster
7. Rags to riches

(Source: http://wiki.answers.com/Q/What_are_the_seven_types_of_stories_in_the_world)

Another take on this was devised by Sir Arthur Thomas Quiller-Couch, who listed the basic recurring plot types like this:

- person against person
- person against nature
- person against him- or herself
- person against God
- person against society
- person caught in the middle
- man and woman

(Source: <http://lenwilson.us/seven-stories/>)

You Are The Course Book

Who's it aimed at?

Teachers who are sick of using ESL course books.

What can I get out of it?

Learn how to teach English without a course book.

Who's written it?

Matt Purland.

Why did he write it?

Because he's had enough of using ESL course books. He's sick of them. But he's also part of the problem, having written hundreds of pages of material for teachers, including all the popular *Talk a Lot* books, available from <http://www.englishbanana.com>

Er, so is this his last book?

Well, he hopes he won't need to write any more books of teaching material, that's for sure!

Why not?

Because: You Are The Course Book. And what is more – The Course Book Is All Around You.

Er, what?

Read this book.

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