

WHAT'S MISSING?

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This article is a summary of a workshop presented at the 12th MEXTESOL Convention in Puebla, Puebla the 20th of October, 1985. The responses of those who attended the session have convinced us that we should make our checklist for materials evaluation available to a wider public. The list is adapted from Communicative Competence Theory and Practice by Sandra Savignon.

The checklist on pages 58 to 60 can be used either for choosing a new textbook or examining one you are already using to identify its positive and negative points. The list also lends itself for use in examining individual chapters of a book or the book as a whole. The needs of the teacher will determine how it is used.

First, let us explain what our criteria are in designing the list. We feel that the teacher in the classroom should be the one who decides what is important to teach to a specific class and when to teach it. Thus, our list includes a column that says, "Is this aspect desirable in your opinion?" The user of the list may feel that some areas are irrelevant for his or her situation. Those can be ignored. Other users may feel that something is missing. If this is the case please add to our list.

One last point to be made is that our list is intended to be easy to use, practical, and facilitate the analysis of results and allow the user to propose solutions.

There are many criteria which underlie our list but space only permits us to mention them in passing. The age level, students' needs and linguistic background of the learner are important. Also,

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what learning situations do the materials suggest; i.e., active or passive individual, pair or group work? Is the emphasis on grammar or creative use of language or both? Are learning strategies taught explicitly through exercises or explanations? The reader may add to these as he or she thinks necessary.

Next we must give an explanation of what each of the areas on the checklist intends to evaluate (See Appendix A.) Some points are self explanatory and will be omitted.

1. Games or puzzles that let learners practice a specific grammatical point or structure.

2. Standard grammar drills such as transformations, substitutions etc.

7. The learner is given the rule and examples then goes on to do exercises.

8. The learner is given language data from which he figures out the rules. This is also known as discovery learning.

The section on cultural information, points 11-15, refers to readings which could serve a double purpose. They could be used for providing cultural information and language data. Obscure cultural references and allusions are those which need to be explained when the textbook is intended to be used in the country where the target language is spoken but is used out of the country. This could be a textbook written by English authors in England for English students who live there, but which is used for teaching English in Mexico. In this kind of textbook, it is often taken for granted that the students will understand any allusions to local habits or institutions. It might be difficult, however, for a student in another country to find out about such specific points. The language teacher must, therefore, be prepared to explain these references, so that students will be able to appreciate the texts in question. This kind of textbook might be useful for advanced students or for students who are planning to study abroad.

13. Refers to more general readings which could be historical or geographical.

16. These are readings taken directly from English language publications intended for native speakers. The selections have not been altered for teaching purposes.

17. The selections have been written by the authors of the textbook often for the purpose of illustrating a certain grammatical structure.

18. The textbook provides the learner with opportunities to test his/her comprehension of a reading through information transfer, paraphrasing or filling in a chart.

19. The book makes explicit the use of strategies, cognates and so forth to the learner.

22. As far as listening comprehension is concerned, it is useful for students to hear native speakers voices so that if and when they come into contact with native speakers, they will find them easier to understand.

23. Tapes presenting dialogue material can be used to vary presentations of language data.

24. Refers to listening practice, in which the students do not have a printed version in front of them.

26. Exercises requiring writing to emphasize a certain grammatical point.

27. More creative writing that permits the learner to state his/her opinions, feelings or ideas about something.

How to use the checklist: (See Appendix B.)

1. First decide whether you would like to see points 1-27 in your textbook and indicate yes or no in the first column.

2. Secondly, indicate whether or not these points appear in the textbook, using the second column.

3. Thirdly, mark the points where there is a difference between columns 1 and 2. This locates the problem areas.

4. Finally, decide how to solve the problem;
 - (i) If the point appears in the textbook, but is not thought desirable, the teacher can either omit it, or leave it as homework.
 - (ii) If the point does not appear, and the teacher would like it to, the teacher can use one of the suggestions given below.
5. A further refinement, when analyzing the textbook, would be to register not only whether a certain item appears, but whether it is dealt with satisfactorily from the teacher's point of view. If not, then again, the teacher could use the suggestions offered.

The check-list can be used for comparing two or more possible textbooks. The only change that the user would have to make would be to add more columns. In this way, it would be possible to see at a glance whether a certain aspect were present or not in a given textbook. The list of solutions is intended for those who have set textbooks which, although they may be unsuitable for their particular teaching needs, cannot be changed. It suggests some ways in which teachers can improve and supplement their existing materials. Finally, the bibliography includes two types of books; those which can be used for reference and those which provide new ideas and activities for the classroom.

APPENDIX A

A.	GRAMMAR	Is this aspect desirable in your opinion?		Is this aspect present in the book?	
		Yes	No	Yes	No
	1- Activities for application of grammar rules	[]	[]	[]	[]
	2- Grammar drills and exercises	[]	[]	[]	[]
	3- Grammar explanations are given in book	[]	[]	[]	[]
	Grammar is presented in:				
	4- Second and native language	[]	[]	[]	[]
	5- Second language only	[]	[]	[]	[]
	6- Native language only	[]	[]	[]	[]
	7- A deductive way	[]	[]	[]	[]
	8- An inductive way	[]	[]	[]	[]
	9- Both deductive and inductive	[]	[]	[]	[]
	10- Separate sections in each unit	[]	[]	[]	[]
B.	CULTURAL INSIGHTS AND INFORMATION				
	11- Customs and places of interest described in detail	[]	[]	[]	[]
	12- References &/or allusions which need to be explained because of strong cultural content	[]	[]	[]	[]

APPENDIX A Cont.

	Is this aspect desirable in your opinion?		Is this aspect present in the book?	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
13- Readings given about country or countries where L ₂ is spoken	[]	[]	[]	[]
14- Songs that would illustrate cultural features	[]	[]	[]	[]
15- Poetry that would illustrate cultural features	[]	[]	[]	[]
C. READING COMPREHENSION				
16- Authentic readings	[]	[]	[]	[]
17- Readings written for text	[]	[]	[]	[]
18- Activities for reading comprehension	[]	[]	[]	[]
19- Reading strategies explained	[]	[]	[]	[]
D. CONVERSATION				
20- Activities for creative oral language use; i.e. rôle play, storytelling, communicative games etc	[]	[]	[]	[]
21- Provides practice situations for students to express their own opinions	[]	[]	[]	[]

APPENDIX A Cont.

	Is this aspect desirable in your opinion?		Is this aspect present in the book?	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
E. LISTENING COMPREHENSION				
22- Tapes with authentic dialogues; i.e. native speakers' voices	[]	[]	[]	[]
23- Tapes presenting material from book (e.g. dialogues, readings etc.)	[]	[]	[]	[]
24- Tapes used for specific listening practice	[]	[]	[]	[]
25- Tapes with grammar and pronunciation exercises and repetition drills	[]	[]	[]	[]
F. WRITING				
26- For reinforcement of grammar points	[]	[]	[]	[]
27- For practicing written expression, letters, stories, poetry, etc.	[]	[]	[]	[]

APPENDIX B

The following is a short list of possible solutions for the problem areas that you may have uncovered using the two checklists. To use the ideas just cross-check them with the numbers in parentheses which correspond to an aspect mentioned in the checklist. The 6 areas are given below:

A. GRAMMAR

- make up grammar worksheets dealing with specific points (1,2)
- supplement with your own grammar explanations in class (3)
- change language of presentation to conform to your likes (4,5,6)
- change form of presentation (7,8)

B. CULTURAL INSIGHTS AND INFORMATION

- bring in extra readings and/or tapes from English language radio stations (VIP), newspapers (The News), magazines (11, 12, 13, 14)
- provide explanations of cultural features (12)
- do library research (15)

C. READING COMPREHENSION

- bring in outside readings from magazines, newspapers, books do not adapt the text rather simplify the tasks ie make the questions easier (16,17,18)
- worksheets on strategies (19)

D. CONVERSATION

- include communicative games, rôle play etc (20)
- stimulate debates, discussions etc (21)

APPENDIX B Cont.

-use visual aids, collages, cut-outs (20)

E. LISTENING COMPREHENSION

-interview and tape native speakers (visitors, tourists, co-workers) (22)

-discriminating use of commercial tapes-only use what coincides with the particular unit being studied (24)

-do drills orally in class use lab time for more productive activities (23,25)

-record selections from textbook to vary presentation (23)

F. WRITING

-use various stimuli for creative expression eg pictures, collages, prior class discussion of a topic (27)

-bring in worksheets (26)

Suggested Reading List:

Grammar:

Swan, Michael (1980). Practical English Usage, (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Thomson, A J and Martinet, A V (1980). A Practical English Grammar. Exercises, (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Reading Strategies:

Scott, Michael (1981). Read in English, (Essex: Longman).

Listening Comprehension:

Aitken, Rosemary (1983). Making Sense. Skill of Listening, elementary, (Walton-on-Thames: Thomas Nelson and Sons, Ltd)

McClintock, John and Stern, Börje (1980). Let's Listen, Stages 1 and 2, (London: Heinemann Educational Books).

Songs:

Papa, Mario and Lantorno, Giuliano (1979). Famous British and American Songs and their Cultural Background, (Great Britain: Longman).

Communicative Games:

Granger, Colin (1980). Play Games with English, Books 1 and 2, (London: Heinemann Educational Books).

Hadfield, Jill (1984). Harrap's Communicative Games. A collection of games and activities for elementary students of English, (Great Britain: Harrap Limited).

Jones, Lewis (1980). Graded English Puzzles, (London: Collins English Library).

Webster, Diana (1977). Guess What? (Language Puzzles), (London: Macmillan Press).

Wright, Andrew et al (1984). Games for Language Learning,
(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Drama:

Maley, A and Duff, A (1982). Drama Techniques in Language Learning, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).