

## WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN AN EFL TEXTBOOK

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Of course this is an issue on which teachers do not always agree and as is often suggested, the 'best textbook' is one which is tried and trusted over the years in the teacher's mind. The following article is my own view based on my experience as a University lecturer.

The textbook should be thick and strong enough to allow constant handling and the quality of the paper good, its appearance attractive both for young pupils and adult learners alike from all parts of the world. I like it when the student is addressed personally at the beginning of the book as this immediately affords the opportunity for the author to show his personal interest in the student's desire to learn English. Variety in content is essential. Does the book contain dialogues, reading and understanding passages, structural items and formulas, lists of vocabulary and expressions, pronunciation sections and, maybe, 'test yourself' sections, at regular intervals? Whether a student textbook comes as part of a series with teachers' guides, workbooks and tapes are other important considerations. The accompanying teacher's book, if there is one, should permit a certain flexibility because teachers have different methods, and be imaginative and suggestive rather than dictative. It should give the overall and particular short term aims of the author's in a way that is easy to understand, and give advice to the teacher on how to make the best use of all the materials provided.

Quantity and selection of grammar in a textbook should be carefully considered. Authors may select and limit what to include in accordance with the purpose, level, and duration, the three of which also determine the dialect, register, style and media. Does the book bring any special positive contributions for the sake of age groups, different professions, languages, attitudes and culture? If it is a beginner's book, there should

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be a recognition of the need for the letters of the alphabet for those whose script is not Latin (e.g. Chinese and Arabic learners).

I believe that instead of giving the rules of grammar it is more useful if an EFL textbook lets the students figure them out for themselves, but each unit may begin with a short introduction such as:

In this unit we are going to study and practice making sentences like:

**The window was broken by the boy.**

**The boy broke the window.**

A textbook should teach through the senses using the centres of interest common for all second language learners. A unit's structural item/s and everyday vocabulary may be naturally assimilated if introduced passively through a short lively story or dialogue. In fact, if the grammatical examples are meaningful and can be presented in real and familiar situations, the students can formulate rules without difficulty. Although rules of grammar (structure words, inflectional forms, structure sentences, clauses, phrases, formulas, for example), exercise work and repetition may be given orally, the teacher should not expect them to know grammatical terms or labels. Instead, students should be encouraged to understand and use the grammar, not to talk about it. This point is related to another matter of crucial importance. An EFL textbook, particularly one aiming at a level below intermediate, should be sensitive to the students' need to use language for communication. It should allow learners to participate rather than being onlookers, and for productive work, in pairs, fours and halves of the class, to take place.

Obviously, as regards the order in which the grammar is presented, there should be a gradual progression from concrete to abstract, from easy to difficult items, although it is not always very easy to be able to tell which goes with what and which tense comes before the other etc, as to teach the regular 'do' or irregular 'does' first, for instance. A textbook should teach 'one thing' at a time and in the right sequence. Each unit should reinforce what has gone before and prepare the learner for what will follow. Also, new grammar is best introduced with well-known vocabulary and new vocabulary with well-known grammar. A textbook should contain plenty of repetition. In general the EFL textbook should adhere to the principle that "related things are taught together" but show common sense in how it applies such a principle. For instance, it would be no good teaching the genitive 'of' with the possessive pronouns when the former should be taught at a more advanced stage in a course.

If the EFL textbook you decide to investigate passes these rigorous tests and is appropriate for the special needs of your students then do not hesitate to use it.

### GLASSARY

- issue** : question that arises for discussion
- assimilate** : absorb, e.g. ideas, knowledge
- crucial** : decisive; critical
- onlooker** : person who looks on at something happening; not taking part actively
- reinforce** : make something stronger
- adhere** : stick; remain faithful to
- rigorous** : stern; strict; severe

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