

# ETpedia™

## Materials Writing

500 ideas  
for creating  
English language  
materials

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**ENGLISH  
TEACHING**  
*professional*

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# 10 reasons for using this resource

## 1. Supporting day-to-day materials writing

All English language teachers need to create their own materials at some stage in their working lives. Sometimes it's a quick gap-fill exercise to check if the students remember what they did in the previous lesson, or it might be an end-of-term test. Teachers write worksheets to go with videos and songs, and some even write whole sets of materials for use during the term by all the teachers in a school. Or perhaps they want to write and publish their own materials to share with the rest of the ELT world.

Given the vast range of materials that ELT teachers produce daily, it's perhaps surprising that there is so little support and guidance in the form of books and online resources. We hope that this book in the ETpedia series of teacher resources will provide that support.

## 2. From basic principles to extensive materials writing

This resource contains 50 units, covering everything an ELT teacher needs to know about getting started with writing materials – from the basics of creating sentence-level exercises to ways of exploiting longer texts, creating entire worksheets and producing whole sets of lesson materials.

## 3. Units of 10

Each unit contains 10 points. These can take the form of tips, ideas, examples of question types or checklists of general guidelines. Why 10? Because we believe that a list of 10 provides enough information both to inspire you and encourage you to develop your skills further.

## 4. New teachers

If you are just starting out in English language teaching, you may not have the confidence to produce large amounts of your own material, and you may be teaching from a coursebook or materials provided by more experienced colleagues. However, you may still encounter occasions when you wish to try out your own ideas or produce some material to supplement your coursebook. You will find lots of ideas here to help you and provide you with the building blocks to start creating (and later sharing) your own classroom and self-study materials.

## 5. Experienced teachers

If you have been teaching for a while, this resource may both remind you of the techniques needed for materials writing and also give you some fresh ideas for developing your materials writing skills.

## 6. Studying for an ELT qualification

Perhaps you are planning to take the Teaching Knowledge Test (TKT), or studying for another teaching qualification, such as a CELTA or Cert TESOL. On these kinds of courses, you will need to demonstrate your ability to create some basic materials, such as grammar or vocabulary exercises. For teachers taking higher-level qualifications, such as the DELTA, Diploma in TESOL or even an MA with a component in materials design and development, this book will be an invaluable reference.

## 7. Published ELT materials writers

For people who already have their materials published and who earn money from writing, this resource offers a useful set of checklists which you can turn to when you're in need of a few extra ideas or looking for a quick alternative way to design an exercise. It will help to remind you of the key points that you need to bear in mind when starting out on a new writing project. In addition, you may want to create your own set of tips to refer to, using the 'Write your own tips' pages at the end of the book.

## 8. Teacher trainers

If you are a teacher trainer, senior teacher or director of studies who delivers staff training on a range of topics, then the ideas that this resource offers could form the basis for sessions related to materials writing. You could choose one or two lists of tips from a particular section as the focus for a single training session.

## 9. Additional photocopiables and quotes

At the end of this book, you will find an Appendix with additional photocopiable materials. These can be used as they are or adapted and developed to suit your own context. Throughout the book you will also find quotes from experienced writers, sharing their views, ideas and experiences on producing ELT materials.

## 10. More time

If you are familiar with the other ETpedia resource books, you'll know that the books aim to save you time. The one thing that all teachers (and full-time materials writers) say that they lack is time. We hope that by sharing this collection of ideas, based on our many years of experience of writing for our own classes and, later, as published authors, we can save you time when it comes to producing your own materials.

*"I'm a big fan of the ETpedia books as they offer a wealth of information. They are very easy to dip into as a reference as they are clearly labelled and divided into different categories. Perfect for novice teachers finding their feet in the world of EFL, experienced teachers who need a quick refresher on a certain subject or even for teacher trainers to use during input sessions. All in all, the ETpedia books have quickly become an EFL teacher's best companion!"*

**Glenn Standish, Director of Studies, International House, Toruń, Poland**

# 10 types of vocabulary exercise

Sometimes there is very little difference between an exercise that presents a new word and an exercise that practises it. Sometimes an exercise can do both. When writing materials, you will usually want to include practice for vocabulary items that are to become part of the learners' active vocabulary (as opposed to their passive vocabulary: the words and phrases they may know but don't actually use). Practice exercises will mostly focus on the meaning of vocabulary items, but may also practise spelling and collocation.

## 1. Word to a picture

Sometimes a good photo or illustration is the quickest way to teach a word or phrase. So you could write seven or eight words/phrases at the beginning of the exercise and then provide photos to match them to, like this:

Match these verb + noun collocations to the pictures.

1. hail a taxi

a)



2. board a plane

b)



3. catch a bus

c)



Answers: 1.c, 2.b, 3.a

## 2. Word to a definition

As with using pictures in 1., your exercise could ask the students to match the words to definitions. This type of exercise is normally used in higher-level materials.

### Match these parts of a piece of clothing to a–c.

- |           |   |
|-----------|---|
| 1. sleeve | a) the part of a piece of clothing around your neck           |
| 2. cuff   | b) the part of a piece of clothing that covers your arm       |
| 3. collar | c) the part of a piece of clothing that goes round your wrist |

Answers: 1.b, 2.c, 3.a

## 3. Jumbled letters

Once the students have done exercises which present the vocabulary, you can write this kind of exercise for practice of spelling.

### Use these letters to make words connected with food.

usop                      ladas                      team                      shif                      debar

Answers: *soup, salad, meat, fish, bread*

## 4. Opposites

Some lexical sets come with obvious pairs of opposite words so this kind of exercise is useful.

### Match the word to its opposite.

- |         |          |
|---------|----------|
| 1. hot  | a) damp  |
| 2. dry  | b) cold  |
| 3. dark | c) light |

Answers: 1.b, 2.a, 3.c

## 5. Odd word out

Exercises where the students choose the odd word out check their understanding of the relationship between different words. The rubric (see the example below) can also ask them to write why.

**Decide which word is the odd word out? Write your reason(s).**

1. seagull eagle pigeon squirrel dove

2. whale dolphin salmon eel spider

Answers: 1. squirrel, because it doesn't fly. 2. spider, because it doesn't live in the sea.

## 6. Word forms

You can use tables in your materials in a number of ways. One of the most effective is for word-building and focusing on different forms of words.

**Complete the table with the correct form of the word.**

Noun	Adjective
comfort	1.
2.	happy

Answers: 1. comfortable, 2. happiness

## 7. Categories

If you are writing material around a set of vocabulary which also has sub-groups of words within it (such as body parts, types of business, different foods, etc.), the following type of categorisation exercise is useful.

**Put these words in the correct category.**

back                  thigh                  lip                  mouth                  chest                  knee

1. Head and face	2. Arm and leg	3. Rest of body

Answers: 1. lip, mouth; 2. thigh, knee; 3. chest, back



## 8. Pairs of words

When dealing with words that might be confused or which are part of a wider lexical set, you can write exercises where the students have to try to explain the difference to each other. This is a useful speaking activity as well as one that targets the vocabulary. This example is from a lesson on the topic of families.

### Work in pairs. Explain the difference between ...

- a *stepfather* and a *father-in-law*
- a *nephew* and a *cousin*
- a *grandmother* and a *great-grandmother*

## 9. Ranking

After providing controlled practice exercises with correct or incorrect answers, an exercise which asks the students to rank words according to their own opinion provides an interesting alternative. Ranking exercises also generate discussion because the students can try to agree on the order in pairs or groups. Here is an example exercise from a lesson on the topic of watching TV.

### Put these kinds of TV show in order from the most interesting to the most boring for you. Then compare with a partner.

reality show    talk show    crime and suspense    nature documentary    soap opera    evening news

## 10. Personal and real-life examples

When writing in-class materials which can have open-ended answers for the teacher to check, it's always useful to end with an exercise that gets the students to personalise the new vocabulary. This example comes from material teaching the vocabulary for describing places where people live.

### Write an example of each of the following.

- a *capital city* that you would like to visit
- a *village* close to where you live
- the name of one of the *suburbs* of a city you know

# 10 tips for creating board games

Board games occupy a special place in materials writing. They can be a lot of fun for the materials writer to make, and they are very popular with teachers and students. Additionally, with modern software it's easy to make simple but good-looking boards. There are a few things you need to know when embarking on creating a language learning board game, though, and it's also useful to see what kinds of games have been produced before. Here are 10 ideas for board games.

## 1. The basic board

The simplest board for a language learning game is a series of squares going around the page to form a rectangle, with a different task on each square. Make sure your squares are big enough for you to write tasks on them! You can find an example of a board like this on page 170.

## 2. The snakes and ladders board

Instead of a basic board, this time create a grid of squares. As in the children's game snakes and ladders, include snakes (the head on one square and the end of the tail on another square lower down) and ladders (joining a lower square with a higher square). Then add different tasks to various squares on the board. As in the game above, the students move around the board and do the task they land on. If the player lands at the bottom of a ladder, they go up to the top and do the task. If they land on a snake's head, they go down to the tail and do the task there. You can find an example of a snakes and ladders board on page 172.

## 3. Dice or no dice

Many traditional board games are designed to be played with dice. This poses two problems for using them in language learning. First, teachers may not always have dice with them in class, or enough dice for all the groups. Second, this means that you need to have far more squares and tasks for the students to do as they may quickly 'pass over' a key square by rolling a five or six. To get around the dice problem, you could design your board game so that the players use a coin to determine how far they move. Heads means move one square, tails means move two squares.

## 4. Counters

You don't need to make elaborate counters for students to cut out and use in a board game. Students will happily use whatever they have to hand as a counter to move around the board. This might be a ring, a piece of rubber or a small coin. If your board game has squares for players to move through, make sure they are big enough for any one of these unconventional counters.

## 5. Rules

A good language board game will often have simple rules (eg Throw a coin. Move around the board. Answer the questions). Put these on the actual game board itself, perhaps in the corner or in the middle so that everyone can refer to them as they play. You may have slightly more detailed rules or explanations for the teacher on a separate document.

## 6. Game-like elements

Once you have your board, and before you add tasks to the squares, you can add various special squares that are typical of board games. These include things like *Miss a turn*, *Go*

again, Go forward 2 squares, Pick up a card (if your board game also has cards), etc. Don't have more than three or four of these, especially on a small board. You want to ensure that the students will land on plenty of language tasks.

## 7. Board games for vocabulary

For a vocabulary board game, you can put categories or pictures of categories (eg food, drinks, sport, jobs) on various squares. When a student lands on a square, they have to say one or more words in that category. Alternatively, set a mini-challenge on each square for students to answer (eg *Name three things you need to take with you on holiday*). Be careful with questions that have only one possible answer (eg *What is the opposite of happy?*) as this means that that square will only be a challenge for the first person to land on it; subsequent players who land on it will already know the answer.

## 8. Board games for grammar

Instead of vocabulary questions, a grammar board game will have grammar questions on the squares. Again, try to have questions that might yield many correct answers (for example: Name three irregular past tense verbs) rather than only one. Another option would be to have different categories on the board such as *Correct the sentence*, *Change the verb tense*, *Complete the gap* or *Choose the correct answer*. Then for each category, have a list of questions written on a separate worksheet. When a student lands on a square the teacher (or another student) chooses a corresponding question from the category on the worksheet. The advantage of this type of board game is that teachers can customise it by creating their own examples based on grammar they have done in previous classes.

## 9. Board games for speaking practice

In this type of board game, each square contains a simple speaking task. These could be discussion questions (eg *What do you like doing in your free time?*), instructions to tell a short anecdote or descriptive tasks (eg *Tell us about your last holiday* or *Describe a close family member*), or mini role plays (eg *You are in a clothes shop. Ask for something in a particular size and colour*).

## 10. Other variations

You can make your board game more interesting by giving the board a theme, such as a town map or a racing track. For a town board game, draw (or find online) a blank map of a town and include various different buildings such as a post office, a train station, a hotel, a souvenir shop, a bank and a police station. For each building, create a list of two or three tasks relating to it. This could be a vocabulary task (*Name three things you can buy in a post office*) or a short role play (*Go to the ticket office and buy a return train ticket to London*). The students move their counters around the town, and when they land on a place, the teacher gives them one of the relevant tasks.

For a racing game, create a board that has several different routes with different starting points. Imagine, for example, a circular race track with four or five lanes or a straight running track with different lanes. Divide the lanes up into squares and assign a challenge for each square. The students then each stay in their own lane and move forwards, or stay put, depending on whether they answer the challenge correctly.