

Methods of Using Newspaper to Develop Students' Speaking Skills

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Abstract: *This article is about some useful methods by the help of newspaper materials for developing speaking skills on students. It's also relevant and effective to use newspapers during the process of teaching English.*

Keywords: newspaper material, up-to-date course book, TEFL, springboard, authentic material, human interest.

Introduction

If you ask any new ESL/EFL teacher what comes to mind as an authentic reading activity for their learners and almost certainly one of the first things they will say is “using a newspaper”. There has been much use and abuse of newspapers in the ELT profession. This article takes a fresh look at newspapers and suggests what to do, and what to perhaps avoid doing. Why do so many teachers like using newspapers? Well, to start with, newspapers are much more current than course books. There is also a lot of information in newspapers which make them an excellent springboard for lessons. Finally, there are lots of different kinds of texts in newspapers (narratives, stories, letters, advertisements, reports...). So what do teachers do with newspapers? One of the problems with newspapers is that they are often used as an up-to-date course book activity. The teacher applies the same pedagogical principles and exercises that are in the course book. Two major problems tend to emerge from this approach:

- It can be extremely time-consuming for teachers
- It is not necessarily interesting for learners

If you are going to use a newspaper, the task itself should be authentic wherever possible, not merely the material. One aim of reading newspapers should be to encourage their reading outside the classroom as well. If you TEFL is a text too much, you run the risk of killing the enjoyment from it.

We have put together a list of 6 Dos and 6 Don'ts that we adhere to when using newspapers in class. Read them and decide for yourself whether you agree or not. Then perhaps you can try some of the ideas we include that follow.

Newspaper DOs and DON'Ts

Do...

- Use English language newspapers produced for the local community if you are teaching in a country where English is not an official language. Many large cities will have a newspaper in English. The topics within these papers are likely to have more of an impact on the learners than topics that are specific to the British or American press.
- Allow learners to select an article that interests them, work on it and report back to other learners.
- Be clear on aims. Is it reading or speaking you want to practice? Or both?
- Get learners to read outside class as much as possible.
- Make your tasks as authentic as the material. Tasks like “underline all the verbs in the past” are of limited value and should be used sparingly. Think about what people do when they read newspapers in their own language.
- Help learners to become better learners. Reading is a great way of acquiring language. If you can get your learners to regularly dip into English newspapers then their reading skills, writing skills and vocabulary will improve. Talk about reading and comprehension of English texts with your learners as well, and share strategies that they use when reading. How often do they use a dictionary for example? At the end of a course, do they feel they are reading faster or better?

Don't...

- Make a song and dance about teaching words like headline, editorial, column, leader. Is it useful for learners?
- Assume learners are interested in British, American, Canadian or Australian culture, particularly tabloid gossip. The British tabloids, for example, are a culturally specific type of newspaper and are not universal.
- Dwell on comparative style and discourse features of tabloid papers versus broadsheets. These are often either obvious or of interest only to journalists and media students.
- Assume what you find interesting in a newspaper will interest your learners.
- Spend ages blanking out words (if you want to do this type of exercise get your learners to white out words themselves and test each other).

- Set simple tasks for lower level learners with a very difficult piece of text, e.g. Find three numbers and two countries in this 3 column article on the Middle East. Unless these tasks are followed up with an opportunity to comprehend and interact with the text, they're condescending and (almost) pointless.

Role play the news

Choose an interesting article or story from the newspaper and make enough copies for every pair of learners. There are often "human interest" stories in the newspaper which adapt themselves well to role play ("Man finds long lost brother"; "Lottery winner buys a house for pet dog" etc.). Ask learners to first read the newspaper and then improvise a short role play. Role plays from newspapers are often conducted one of two ways: 1) one learner plays the journalist and the other plays the protagonist of the story; the journalist does an interview, or 2) learners each take the role of a person in the story and act out the story, or something that happens before or after the story.

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