

*“It’s not that some people have willpower and some don’t. It’s that some people are ready to change and others are not.”*

*James Gordon, M.D.*

## Coursebooks

### How to Evaluate Teaching Materials,

There are two elements in the process of learning and teaching and they are the learner and the teacher. The atmosphere and the relationship between these two is more than important. Good teachers never stop searching for materials that can help them to achieve the goals of teaching and to improve the atmosphere, to strengthen the motivation of the pupils. A good textbook can be of great help, and so can be other materials that can be products of either teacher’s or learner’s creativity.

The first material used is, of course, a coursebook. With the vast range of different titles offered by different publishing houses for different levels nowadays it is not an easy task for the teacher to choose the right title for the right group of learners. Let’s have a look at the criteria for coursebook evaluation:

Possible areas for consideration	Possible questions for coursebook analysis
Price and availability	Not all students can afford to buy an expensive textbook of foreign origin. Even if they invest the money, the coursebook may not be an ideal one and needs to be completed by some extra materials. The whole package consists not only of the student’s book, but there are usually other supplementary parts: a teacher’s book, workbook, audio-cassette or CD, even video-cassette. Quite a large sum of money is needed. How much will the student have to pay, and how much the teacher?
Add-ons and extras	Apart from a textbook and workbook the publisher usually offers some extra supplementary materials. Either the flash-cards or the pictures, maps, posters. There may be websites devoted to the book with suitable exercises and some optional materials. Also the discussion pages may appear. Are they easily available? Is it worth the value (time and money)?
Layout and design	Is the book attractive and challenging for the particular level of students? Are there pictures, colours? Is the workbook just black and white (not very attractive in the era of colour TV and PC). Do I as a teacher like the design of the book? Does it look like cheap commerce?
Instructions	Instructions appear mainly before each exercise. The teacher and the learner will also be interested in the instructions explaining grammar, pronunciation or vocabulary and their use. Are the instructions in English or in Czech? Are they clear and brief? Will students understand without teacher’s help?
Methodology	Do the methods respect the age and the level of my students? Is there a balance between accuracy and fluency exercises, between study and activation? Do the authors respect the natural approach towards language acquisition or do they just teach?
Syllabus	Does the book contain the topics of my students’ interest? Is there an expected logical sequence of topics? Do the units cover the expected

	amount of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation? Does the coursebook build in a feeling of progress?
Language skills	Are all skills in the coursebook covered in balance? Are there challenging activities offered? How many open-ended and close-ended tasks? How many writing as a means and writing as an end exercises? Do the texts offer natural spoken English? Is there chance enough to study and activate?
Topics	Topics are interdependent with the syllabus. Is there a variety of topics that are adequate to the level and interest of my students? Do the topics suit their age? Are they challenging enough? Do the topics integrate other subjects, too?
Cultural appropriacy	Are the texts in the coursebook plus the exercises appropriate for the learning of culture? Are there any multicultural items? Is the coursebook unprejudiced in the way it deals with different customs, ethnicities, races and sexes? Does the cultural view in the book enrich my students' worldview?
Teacher's guide	The teacher's book should be a counsellor and the guide for the teacher. Does it have all the answers that teachers and students need? Will the book help me to answer my students' curious questions? Does it provide differentiated activities for a heterogeneous class with slow and fast students of roughly different levels? Does it explain things clearly? Will the book help me with my lesson and syllabus planning?

(The table was adapted from Harmer: How to Teach English, Longman 2007)

An ideal coursebook does not exist. It will always be the teachers who can adapt the materials, add and replace exercises according to the group of students they are teaching. The teachers should make decisions about which coursebook to use. The decision is based on analysis (see the points mentioned in the table), piloting, consultation and gathering of opinions from students and colleagues. Unfortunately the reality in Czech schools is different. The teacher can hardly ever feel free to choose the suitable coursebook. It has already been chosen before, money has been invested and the book with an obligatory "doložka ministerstva školství" was bought years ago. Now the school is short of money and just new workbooks can be bought. Of course they are workbooks belonging to the same old textbook. Therefore the importance of choosing and bringing other additional materials into the teaching process must be highlighted. Not all the materials are expensive. Some may even be free of charge. The criteria of evaluation with the additional materials are roughly the same as in the table above. For the materials see the chapter Supplementary Materials.

## Supplementary Materials in ELT

This chapter talks about supplementary materials which refresh our classroom "chores".

No matter how colourful the English textbooks are nowadays, they become boring one day as they are present in the lesson every day and pupils have touched them so many times. No wonder that children expect anything new, amusing and attractive. Let's have a look at what the teacher can offer.

**Books** are a good source of material. The teacher can use a book of the month. He/she reads a part from the book every lesson, explains things using pictures, gestures, miming with the system “to be continued”. If there is a small English bookcase in the classroom, children can search in the books themselves. A library is one of the best ways for learners to acquire a wide experience of foreign language reading. Just the teacher has to advertise reading and motivate pupils. It is also very useful to have a collection of reference books, extra textbooks and teachers’ handbooks available to refresh teacher’s own work and update his/her thinking. Professional journals are read because of the similar reason.

**Pictures, posters, maps and cards** are invaluable for learners. In the age of computers they are still widely used and they constantly serve as a good stimulus in ELT with pupils. This type of material is usually very cheap as it mostly can be home-made. Teachers either draw the pictures themselves, prepare flashcards or they may use magazines, advertising leaflets as an excellent source of pictures. The second ones are sometimes not preferably focused on a particular thing. Children usually find something “interesting“ in the background of the picture and keep the teacher ready all the time. Unlike modern technology this group of supplementary material is reliable and they do not ruin your lesson because of breakdown, electricity failure or bulbs burning down. Pupils can create some suitable materials themselves. Thus English can be interconnected with arts. Pupils can make pictures, masks, hats puppets, models of streets or buildings etc., inspired by the places and characters in the texts they read.

**Real authentic material** brings fresh air into the classroom, too. Leaflets for tourists advertising some British beauties can be of real use. Pupils can scan the text and find necessary information (opening times, admission discounts, refreshment rooms available or whereabouts the place is situated). Timetables, entrance tickets, menus, advertisements air, bus or railway tickets and real photographs can be very attractive for children. Some of them will gladly bring the thing themselves as there are more and more children nowadays who travel with their parents and various organizations.

**Overhead projectors** (a bit old-fashioned) are a group of school technology which is being enlarged with new types of **visualizers** every year. They enable to present pictures or written material to classes. The teachers can prepare the displays in advance and thus they save time in the lesson (but not during your lesson planning). Anyhow they are vivid and attention-catching compared to black or whiteboards.

**Video equipment** and **data-projector** used sometimes just to survive the last lessons before school holidays is in fact an excellent source of real spoken language. It is attractive and motivating. Thanks to the fact that it is flexible it offers a variety of activities. You can run forward or back. You can start and stop it. You can freeze it to talk about the passage. You can switch the sound off and ask the pupils to guess the dialogue. You can switch the picture off and let the pupils talk about the situation in the dark screen. When planning a video lesson, have an alternative lesson ready as the technology is just dependent on electricity and might not always fulfil your wishes.

**Audio equipment** is usually a user-friendly device. Cassette recorders and cassettes are relatively cheap and they are a good source of the language spoken by native speakers. They are portable and easy to use. Unfortunately firms hardly ever produce the equipment with a counter which would save much time in the lesson. CD and DVD players mean a step

forward, they are popular among pupils and enable to motivate pupils and train the language all rolled in one.

**Smart board** (interactive board) gives the teacher and the students immense possibilities to apply their creativity.

**Computer!** Not being “computerate” (computer literate) is like having just one hand nowadays. Pupils are more skilful with the computer than the teacher sometimes and most of them really like the computers. This is a good chance for the English teacher to take advantage of the PC and enrich his/her lessons. There are many websites where suitable materials are available. Just the lesson could be rather short since a lot of time in a computer lesson goes on setting up programs, getting pupils into them, and then solving problems with moving in the program (not mentioning the time needed to train both teachers and pupils to use PCs).

If you have not found anything special so far, just go shopping. In toy-shops and stationeries there are numbers of unconventional teaching aids. You only have to enter the shop with creative and inventive eyes. If you are not willing to spend your money here then DIY (do it yourself) is a solution. A home made small pillow or a puppet is lovelier than a plastic one, isn't it?

When using supplementary material we need to consider how best it can be used to contribute to our everyday struggling in lessons, to our pupils' learning. It should be integrated into our plan of work.