

# Tailor-Made Material Design & Textbook Revision: A DIY Guide

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## Introduction

Each class and student we teach is unique, requiring authentic and specifically tailored materials. Often, commercially available textbooks do not align with the precise levels, abilities, or needs of the students. As a result, educators frequently create original materials to break up the monotony of a standard curriculum or to personalize the learning experience for their students.

Textbook development involves the intricate process of creating, designing, and publishing a custom textbook. It is crucial for educators to recognize that learner needs are dynamic and can change based on the individual or the class as a whole. Therefore, teaching methods and materials need to be continuously updated to reflect new trends, interests, and the evolving abilities of the learners. Every teacher brings their own ideas and activities to the classroom; however, compiling these ideas into a cohesive and structured learning resource is not an easy task.

The author, throughout the teaching process, regularly took notes on what worked successfully and what needed improvement. This reflective practice helped identify areas for revision, allowing for adjustments while the experience was still fresh. These notes included adaptations to existing material, errors that needed correcting, and specific activities that didn't work as planned or required further updating. Furthermore, new ideas that emerged during class were noted for potential future use.

This paper will delve into the author's experiences in revising the textbook *Two-Way Street*, sharing insights into the process of tailoring educational materials to better suit the evolving needs of learners. The challenges, successes, and methods for revising and improving textbook content will be explored, providing a guide for educators looking to refine and enhance their own teaching materials.

## **Literature Review**

Research in material development emphasizes the need for textbooks to be progressive, diverse, and challenging, providing an engaging and integrated language learning experience (Tomlinson, 2021). It is essential to consider learners' needs and educational backgrounds, incorporating culturally relevant materials to enhance the learning experience (Burns, 2019; August & Shanahan, 2006).

To maximize learning potential, materials should be tailor-made to fit the specific needs of a group of learners. One of the clear advantages of designing custom materials is contextualization (Block, 1991). In this case, the target group is Japanese university students who require English for academic progression, career advancement, and travel opportunities. One significant challenge they face is learning academic content while simultaneously improving their English proficiency (Goldenberg & Coleman, 2010).

Exposure to authentic input is widely recognized as more effective for language acquisition than simplified or generic materials (Mishan, 2005; Tomlinson, 2021). Nunan (1988) defines authentic materials as those created for real-world language use, not specifically for language teaching. The Two-Way Street (TWS) model, for example, structures each chapter around a specific communicative function (e.g., telling time or giving compliments). Allowing learners to actively engage and apply these functions leads to a deeper understanding and retention of language concepts.

This approach also incorporates the Semantic Feature Analysis (SFA) model, which helps learners grasp relationships between concepts and vocabulary (Buehl, 2017). Learners are encouraged to integrate prior knowledge with new terms and functions, simultaneously building semantically related groups of words and ideas (Olsen, 2016).

Understanding how second languages are learned is essential in the material design process. Green (2020) outlines key goals for material design, which include providing comprehensible input, opportunities for output, and fostering both affective and cognitive engagement. These elements, when combined with sufficient practice time, lead to meaningful interaction and language acquisition (see Appendix I). These five design principles must be integrated into textbook materials to ensure that language acquisition theories are effectively applied in practice.

## **The Process**

This section outlines the steps involved in revising *Two-Way Street*, which includes three main phases: Research and Planning, Content Creation/Design, and Editing/Publishing.

### **Research and Planning**

When selecting topics for your material, it's crucial to identify the target audience, curriculum requirements, and educational goals. Studies show that when students connect what they are learning to real-life experiences or their cultural backgrounds, they become more engaged and motivated, ultimately learning more (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2005).

Remember to always design with the audience in mind. Sometimes, giving clear instructions can be the most challenging part of an activity. It's important to keep directions simple, clear, and direct. Each chapter should maintain continuity and uniformity, employing scaffolding by breaking the learning process into manageable chunks. For example, in *Two-Way Street* (TWS), each chapter begins with a simple picture and dialogue (see Appendix II). Learners are then asked to fill in the speech bubbles with their own ideas during the lesson. Initially, this task may seem daunting or confusing, but after completing a few chapters, students start to enjoy crafting dialogue and sharing with their partners. Positive reinforcement and feedback encourage students to engage and take ownership of their creative input, capturing the teacher's attention.

### **Content Creation**

Content creation is the most time-consuming aspect of the project because it requires designing, creating layouts, selecting images, and mastering new software tools. For this revision, the author used Adobe Illustrator (AI) due to prior familiarity, but there are several alternatives available depending on individual needs. Applications can vary with price and complexity below are some suggestions. (See table 1)

**Table 1** *Design Applications*

<b>Application</b>	<b>Developer</b>	<b>Platform</b>	<b>Features</b>	<b>Price</b>
Affinity Designer & Publisher	Sefir	macOS, Windows, iPad	User-friendly interface, advanced typography, vector and raster design	One-time purchase, no subscription
CorelDRAW	Corel	macOS, Windows	professional-grade vector graphics editor, extensive layouts, strong with complex illustrations	Subscription-based, with a continuous license option
Inkscape	Open-source community	macOS, Windows, Linux	wide range of drawing tools, object manipulation, and text support, comparable to Adobe Illustrator	Free
Canva	Canva Pty Ltd	Web-based, macOS, Windows, iOS, Android	user-friendly design tool with extensive library of templates and graphics and photos	Free or Pro subscription for additional features

Learning to use these tools can take time, so selecting the right software for your specific project is essential. There are many resources available to help with content creation. For example, Fiverr is a great online marketplace where educators can find freelancers offering design services at affordable rates.

When designing materials, visual aids play a vital role in helping learners grasp essential information quickly (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2005). Effective materials should be aesthetically pleasing, up-to-date, and flexible (Howard & Major, 2005). *Two-Way Street* focuses heavily on pair and group work, with an emphasis on educational games. A well-designed game adapts challenges to match learners' abilities, keeping them engaged. If learners are still participating and speaking after the activity's official time has ended, it's a sign that the task has been successful.

Revising existing content is less complicated than creating from scratch because the foundational ideas are already in place. During and after each class, the author made

notes about which revisions were necessary. The best time to reflect on changes, adjustments, or new ideas is immediately after the lesson, while they're still fresh in your mind. These revisions could include changes in instructions, adapting or updating activities, correcting mistakes, and integrating new ideas based on student feedback or observed outcomes.

### **Publishing**

In the past, *Two-Way Street* was published through a small publishing company in Okayama Prefecture, Daigakukyoiku Shinpan, with no editing support or financial gain. However, with the advancement of online platforms and a recommendation from a colleague, the author opted for self-publishing through Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP). KDP is a self-publishing platform developed by Amazon, allowing authors to publish and sell their books as eBooks and print-on-demand paperbacks on Amazon.

Initially, working with KDP was smooth, but complications soon arose with layout specifications, trim sizes, and printing options. If the specifications are not precise, KDP will reject the manuscript. The entire process of exporting all pages as PDFs, combining them, and uploading the final document had to be repeated multiple times before everything was in order. The process took several days to correct and ensure the document was acceptable for KDP's review. For instance, to combine all 106 pages from Adobe Illustrator into a single PDF for KDP, the steps are as follows:

1. Export each page as a PDF (File > Save As) and organize them in a dedicated folder.
2. Combine all PDFs into a single document using Adobe Acrobat (File > Combine > Merge Files into a Single PDF).
3. Review all pages to ensure they are in the correct order and format.
4. Upload the completed PDF to KDP.
5. Submit the document for preview and approval.

This process ensures that the textbook is correctly formatted and ready for publication, although it can be challenging to meet KDP's exact specifications, particularly regarding margins and bleed. If these elements are not perfectly aligned, the manuscript will not be accepted. Once all these hurdles were cleared, the book was officially submitted for final review. After about a week, this message appeared: "Congratulations, your paperback, *Two-Way Street*, is now published on Amazon. Any updates or changes made to your book are now live."

## Conclusion

The central and fundamental goal of exploring the use of authentic materials in EFL instruction is to empower educators by expanding their teaching strategies through the incorporation of real-world materials. This approach enriches the classroom experience, fostering student engagement and leading to clearer, more effective learning outcomes.

One of the most practical ways to enhance teaching resources, such as textbooks, is to apply them in real classroom settings. Through the continuous use of student feedback, teachers can discern what aspects of the materials resonate and what may fall short. Learners provide invaluable insights—both directly and indirectly—into what they find enjoyable, effective, or challenging. Gathering this feedback can be done through various methods such as testing, classroom surveys, and observing students' attitudes and behaviors during lessons. As noted by Howard and Major (2005), language teachers often initiate materials development based on intuition and trial and error. However, this method can sometimes lead to overlooked issues or missed opportunities for improvement.

Despite these efforts, teaching is not always a predictable process. The author, for instance, has experienced teaching the same lesson with identical materials to different classes, only to observe contrasting results. One class may be highly engaged and responsive, while another may seem distant and disengaged. This unpredictability highlights the complex nature of teaching, even with thoughtfully designed materials and proven methodologies. It brings to mind the adage, “You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make it drink.” Each student and class presents a unique dynamic, which demands flexibility and patience from the teacher.

Ultimately, educators must carefully consider the advantages and challenges of designing and using authentic materials. As Harmer (2001) aptly observes, “The good DIY teacher, with time on his or her hands, with unlimited resources, and the confidence to marshal those resources into a clear and coherent language program, is probably about as good as it gets for the average language learner” (p. 9). This statement highlights the importance of balancing thorough preparation with adaptability. Teachers need to ensure that their materials not only fulfill educational goals but also cater to the diverse and ever-evolving needs of their students. By doing so, they can create an effective and engaging learning environment that maximizes student success.

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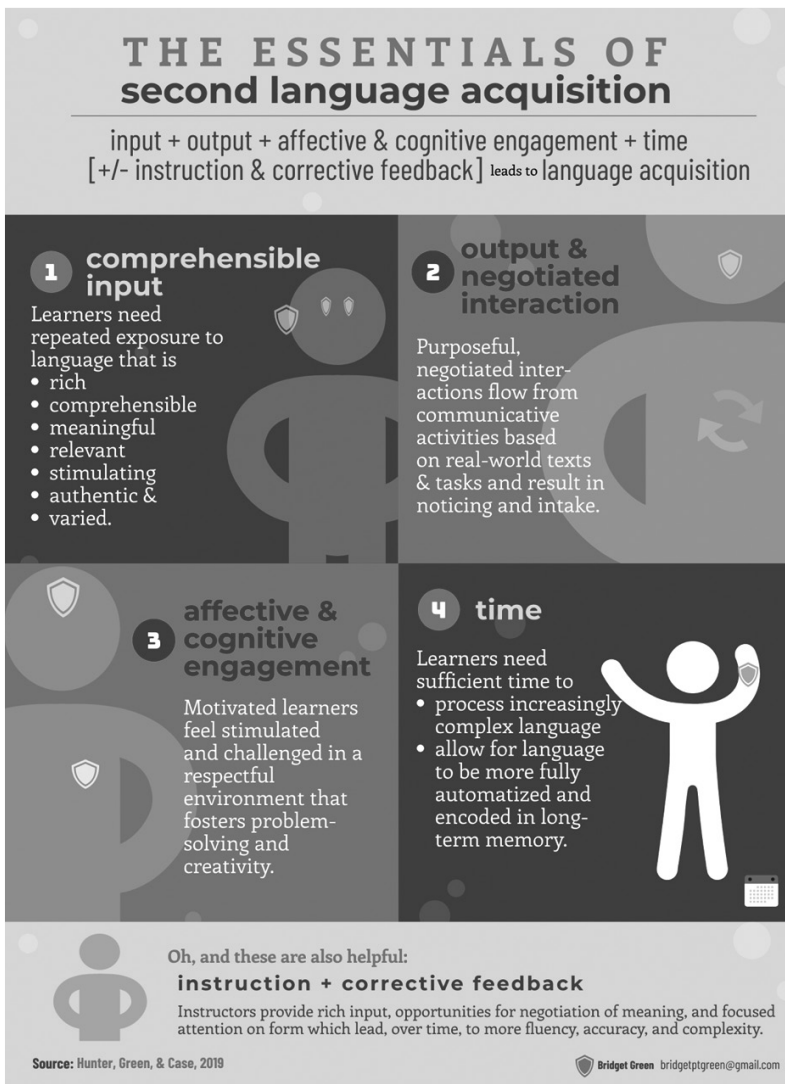
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## Appendix I

### SLA essentials infographic (Green, 2020)



## Appendix II

### Two-Way Street Example of Continuity & Uniformity

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#### Practice the dialog with your partner

- Jodi : Thanks for dinner, Mrs. Marco. It was really delicious.  
 Mrs. Marco : I'm glad you liked it.  
 Jodi : Can I help you clean up?  
 Mrs. Marco : Sure. I'll wash and you can put things away.  
 Jodi : Okay. Where does the butter go? (A1)  
 Mrs. Marco : It goes in the refrigerator. (B1)  
 Jodi : Where do the napkins go? (A2)  
 Mrs. Marco : They go in the top drawer. (B2)  
 Jodi : And where should I put this last piece of pie?  
 Mrs. Marco : Why don't you put it in your stomach?

#### Usage Hint

**Singular Nouns Use :** Does + it  
 Where does the soda go? It goes on the table.  
**Plural Nouns Use :** Do + they/them  
 Where do the glasses go?  
 They go in the sink. / Put them in the sink.

#### Practice more by substituting the underlined parts.

<b>A1</b> frying pan	sugar bowl	pot	dish towel
<b>B1</b> Under the sink	On the counter	In the oven	On the towel rack
<b>A2</b> glasses	dishes	knives	salt and pepper shakers
<b>B2</b> In the cabinet	On the shelf	Under the sink	On the table

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## Abstract

From designing the artwork to adapting popular games for the ESL classroom, creating your own materials is a time-consuming and meticulous process. Planning effective ESL (English as a Second Language) materials requires a firm understanding of pedagogical principles and practical strategies. Educators often start the task of material development through trial and error and experience, without a solid comprehension of design principles. This paper describes the process of updating and revising an ESL textbook. In doing so, the author provides advice and suggestions for creating and designing tailor-made materials that teachers should take into consideration. This specific textbook is designed for learners with a passive knowledge of English, lacking the practical or communication skills needed to communicate effectively.

Key words: materials design, revising, authenticity, communication, engagement

