

English Teaching Materials Advice

There is a huge range of English language teaching materials available. The best ones to use depend on lots of factors, such as the skills your learners want to focus on, their preferred learning style, their current level of English proficiency, the equipment available to you, and your location. Below are some suggestions based on the experiences of some people who have taught in Myanmar. If you disagree with any of this advice, or have any suggestions of particularly good materials, please let us know.

It can be a good idea to use a **general English coursebook** (also called a **four-skills** textbook) as the 'backbone' of your classes. These give practice in all the skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening) and cover a range of topics and language points in a systematic manner, becoming progressively more difficult as you move through the course. There are normally four components: Teacher's Book, Student's Book, Workbook and Audio. So make sure you get all of them.

However, it is generally advisable to supplement the coursebook with other materials:

- **Grammar and vocabulary** practice books can be used to clarify a point, provide further practice or broaden their knowledge.
- **Activity** books give ideas for fun games and activities which reinforce the language you've taught. Good ones with activities suitable for all levels include *Activities for the Language Classroom* (produced by Educasia), *Grammar Practice Activities* (by Penny Ur), *Grammar Games and Activities*, *5 Minute Activities* and *Lessons from Nothing*.
- **Graded readers** (books written in simplified English) are very useful for improving reading speed, expanding vocabulary and consolidating known language. They can be used in class or in students' own time, and some come with audio tapes/CDs for listening practice.
- **Reading and writing** courses can help improve those skills. Some focus on academic writing, for those who are planning to study in English; others are more social studies-oriented.
- **Pronunciation** practice materials if they need to work on that.
- **Songs** – some original, some specially written for English learners – can be fun and add variety, and are available for all ability levels. Some already have lesson plans to go with them.
- **Authentic** materials (newspapers, magazines, movies, radio programmes) are useful for students at higher levels. It is useful to provide opportunities to understand and use these while there is a teacher around to guide them. As much as possible, use materials that match their needs and interests: if they plan to study in English, expose them to academic texts; if they are working for an organization, use reports and proposals of the type they will need to deal with. *Caution*: this is only useful if your students already have enough English to understand most of the material.

Materials should be carefully chosen to match the ability of the students. There are different ways of measuring English language proficiency, but the terms most commonly used are *beginner*, *elementary*, *pre-intermediate*, *intermediate*, *upper intermediate* and *advanced*. (It is a good idea to give your students a **diagnostic test** to find out what level they are, and divide them into appropriate classes – Educasia has a couple you can use.)

The following is a selection of materials recommended for each level; all of them are available from the Educasia library unless stated otherwise, and many are on our website.

Beginner and post-beginner

Most materials – even the ‘beginner’ ones – assume your students already know the alphabet, and Educasia does not currently have any materials for teaching absolute beginners. Among the commercial general English coursebooks, *English for Life Beginner* is one of the better ones. It has clear instructions and an easy-to-use format, and less culturally inappropriate material than most other courses. *Language in Use* is also not bad, and perhaps a little easier.

- *Listen First* is a beginner’s listening course focusing on recognition of numbers, dates, letters of the alphabet and simple key points, targeting adult immigrants to the US.
- *Tree or Three* is a basic pronunciation course.
- *Starter, Beginner* or *Level 1* graded readers (various).

Elementary

English for Life Elementary is one of the best commercial four-skills books at this level. For students who don’t like to study a lot of grammar, you could try *New Cutting Edge Elementary*, which takes a topic-based approach, though some students find that very challenging. *New Headway Elementary* is more grammar-oriented, which some students are more comfortable with, but it’s very Eurocentric so most teachers here find a lot of it irrelevant and confusing.

- *Educasia’s Extensive Reading and Writing: Journals and Book Reviews* can be used with elementary students. It introduces the idea of extensive reading and writing to encourages written fluency.
- *World of Knowledge* is a board game testing students’ English and general knowledge. Elementary students may need assistance with this at first.
- *Essential Grammar in Use; Grammar Dimensions 1 and 2; Grammar Spectrum 1; Fundamentals of English Grammar*.
- *English Vocabulary in Use Elementary*.
- *People Like Us*, and *People Like Us, Too* contain vocabulary-oriented lessons on a range of topics designed to understand cultural differences. Most are about pre-intermediate level but some can be used with good elementary classes.
- *Fundamentals of Academic Writing* (Longman).
- *New Headway Elementary Pronunciation Course; Tree or Three*.

Pre-intermediate

Think English Pre-intermediate is the most suitable four-skills course for most classes at this level as it is designed specially for students in Myanmar. If necessary, it can be supplemented with other coursebooks such as *New Headway, Language in Use, English for Life, Reward, New Interchange*, etc.

- Graded readers. Educasia has produced *Skyjack*, a pre-intermediate reading and listening module; and *Romeo and Juliet*, based on a pre-intermediate adaptation of the play by Shakespeare.
- Educasia’s *Educasia’s Extensive Reading and Writing: Journals and Book Reviews* can be used with pre-intermediate students.
- Some of Educasia’s movie modules can be used with students with a high pre-intermediate standard of English, though they will find them difficult. *Mulan, Grave of the Fireflies* and *Bend it like Beckham* are the easiest, followed by *Catch a Fire* and *The Pianist*.
- *World of Knowledge*.
- Educasia’s *An Introduction to Social Sciences* and *Environment and Us* modules are written in high pre-intermediate English and can be used for English language teaching, though they are not designed for that. *A Background to Southeast Asia* and *Gender Issues* may also be manageable with a lot of help from the teacher.
- *Essential Grammar in Use* (to revise the basics); *Grammar Spectrum 2; Grammar Dimensions 1 and 2; Fundamentals of English Grammar*.

- *English Vocabulary in Use: Pre-intermediate and Intermediate.*
- *People Like Us* and *People Like Us, Too* are good for this level.
- *First Steps in Academic Writing* (Longman).
- *New Headway Pre-intermediate Pronunciation Course; Tree or Three.*

Intermediate

There is no specially-written general English course for Myanmar learners at this level so you have to choose a commercial coursebook. *Language in Use Intermediate* is a bit more culturally-neutral than most; it's also a bit easier than most intermediate books. *New Cutting Edge Intermediate* is task-based and a bit harder. *New Headway Intermediate* is more grammar-oriented and Eurocentric.

- At this level, you could start introducing them to authentic materials such as newspaper and magazine articles or radio news programmes (see below) on topics they are interested in, although you will have to go slowly and provide a lot of guidance.
- Educasia's movie modules are good for this level.
- *Persuasive Writing* (by Educasia).
- *World of Knowledge* board game.
- Most of Educasia's social science materials are in approximately intermediate English: *Basic Economics, A Background to Southeast Asia, Gender Issues* and *Global Conflict. The Environment and Us* and *An Introduction to Social Sciences* can be used for easier reading practice.
- *English Grammar in Use; Grammar Dimensions 1 and 2* (for practice of the basics) and 3 (for harder stuff); *Grammar Spectrum 3; Understanding and Using English Grammar.*
- *English Vocabulary in Use: Pre-intermediate and Intermediate; English Vocabulary Organiser.*
- *An Introduction to Academic Writing* (Longman).
- *6-Way paragraphs* provides intensive reading comprehension practice that can be used for self-study and homework. It is easy to use, and provides a helpful 'check your own progress' guide for students.
- If your students are planning to study in English, you may want to use study skills materials such as *Headway Academic Skills 2 and 3, Study Tasks in English* or *Integrating College Study Skills.*
- *People Like Us,* and *People Like Us, Too* should be fairly easy for these students but might give some new vocabulary and stimulate interesting discussions.
- *Ship or Sheep* is an intermediate pronunciation course.
- If you have access to television or the radio, you can use news programmes as the basis for discussions, or develop exercises to accompany them (such as getting students to write summaries of key points).
- www.breakingnewsenglish.com has simplified, short news articles in about intermediate English, with lessons plans.
- At this level, students often want English with a specific focus, such as medical English, English for job hunting or media English. Check out the English for Specific Purposes section in the Educasia library for these materials.

Upper-intermediate and advanced

There are no specially-written coursebooks for Myanmar people at these levels. There is the usual selection of four-skills courses: *Language in Use, New Cutting Edge,* etc., but it is a good idea to get upper intermediate and advanced students using authentic materials – movies, newspapers, books, magazines, and so on. Some might want to work towards internationally recognised qualifications, such as TOEFL or IELTS, for which special courses are available (ask us about these).

- *English Grammar in Use; Advanced Grammar in Use; Grammar Dimensions 3; Understanding and Using English Grammar.*
- *World of Knowledge.*
- *English Vocabulary in Use: Upper-intermediate; English Vocabulary in Use: Advanced.*

- Educasia's social science materials should be fairly easy for these students, but can provide good reading practice and stimulate debates.
- *Writing Academic English* (Longman).
- Graded readers and fairly easy original texts (e.g. *Old Man and the Sea* (Hemingway), *Animal Farm* (Orwell), *The Pearl* (Steinbeck), and *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck))
- Study skills books (see under *Intermediate*).
- Radio and television news programmes (see under *Intermediate*).
- www.breakingnewsenglish.com (see under *Intermediate*)
- For pronunciation: *New Headway Upper-intermediate Pronunciation Course* (we don't have the Advanced one, but it is available in the shops); *Ship or Sheep*.
- At this level, students often want English with a specific focus, such as medical English, English for job hunting or media English. Check out the English for Specific Purposes section in the Educasia library for these materials.

Other stuff

To answer students' difficult language questions ("Teacher, what's the difference between 'small' and 'little'?"), a reference book is useful. Michael Swan's *Practical English Usage* is one of the better ones. Answers to technical questions can often be found online too.

Various general teaching skills books are available. Reading one or two of these can help you improve your teaching.

- *The Practice of English Language Teaching* and *How to Teach English* (both by Jeremy Harmer) are among the best for new teachers.
- *One to One* by Peter Wilberg is good if you have classes with only one or two students.
- *The English Language Teacher's Handbook* from VSO (by Joanna Baker and Heather Westrup) is designed for large classes with few resources, and teachers without fluent English themselves.
- The introduction sections of most general English textbooks contain useful teaching tips.
- The Teacher Training section of the library has books dealing with many aspects of teaching English.

There are also more specialised texts focusing on more narrow aspects of language teaching: tenses, speaking, reading, vocabulary, etc. Have a look in our library and in good bookshops.

There are loads of websites containing lesson plans, teaching tips, discussion forums and answers to language questions. Most of them are useless. The following are some of the better ones, though you still have to look pretty hard to find anything good.

www.breakingnewsenglish.com/

<http://onestopenenglish.com/>

<http://esl.about.com/>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/>

<http://www.voanews.com/specialenglish/index.cfm>

If you have any comments, questions or suggestions, please get in touch:

educasiamyanmar@gmail.com, 095407036