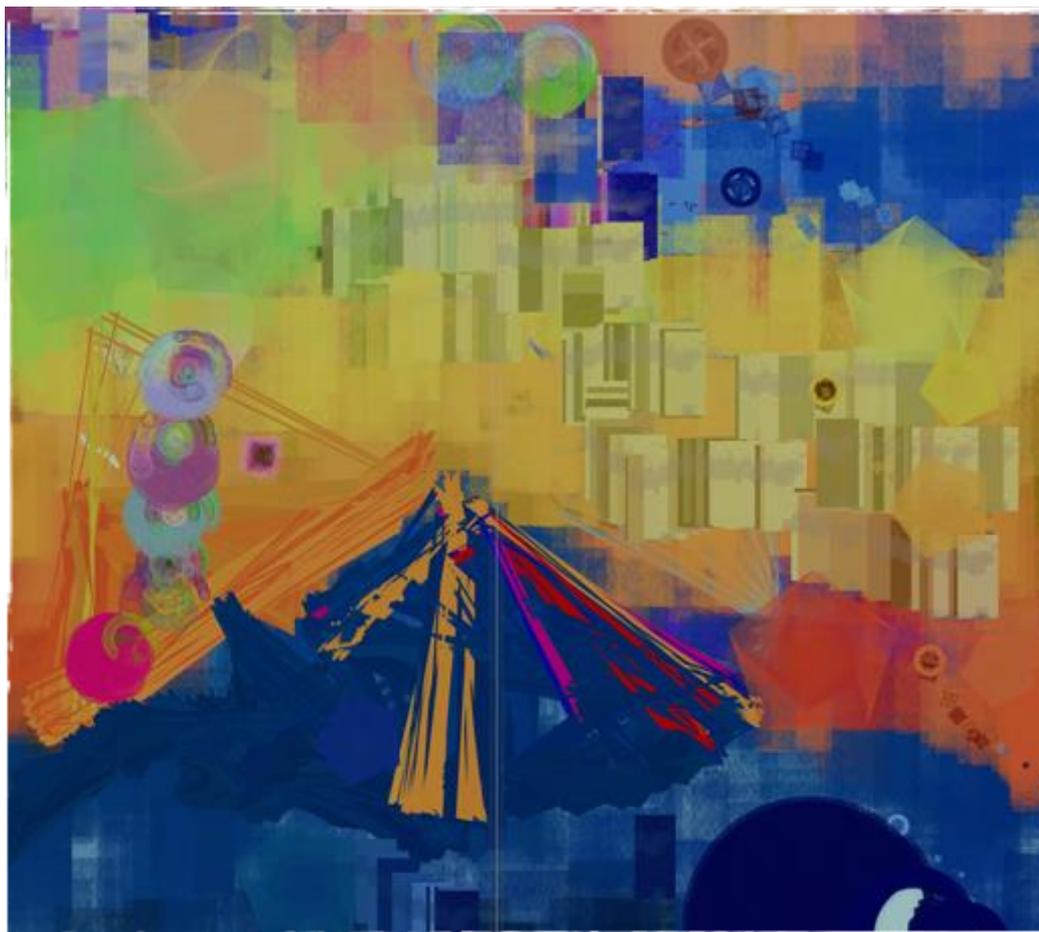


VOLUME  
**29.3**

(2021)

# Between the Keys



## A publication of the JALT Materials Writers Special Interest Group

The Materials Writers SIG was established for the purpose of helping members to turn fresh teaching ideas into useful classroom materials. We try to be a mutual assistance network, offering information regarding copyright law, sharing practical advice on publishing practices, including self-publication, and suggesting ways to create better language learning materials for general consumption or for individual classroom use.

[WWW.MATERIALSWRITERS.ORG](http://WWW.MATERIALSWRITERS.ORG)



# Table of Contents

## Foreword

From the Publication Chair (Joel Neff) .....3

## Articles

Bringing the Coursebook to Life (Brian Tomlinson)  
.....4

Basic Sound Engineering for Creating Listening Materials - Part 1  
(Sam Keith & Brian Cullen) .....12

The ELTons Part One: The Contender  
(Fiona Wall Minami) .....19

# From the Publication Chair

Joel Neff

Dear Readers,

Welcome to issue 29.3 of *Between the Keys*. This issue would normally have seen publication in the last part of 2022, however, as with so many other things, we have found ourselves somewhat delayed by the pandemic. To make up for that, we have brought you an issue with interesting ideas, techniques, and narratives for you to peruse.

The first of these is an article by Brian Tomlinson, the author who, quite literally, wrote the book on designing materials for ESL classes and classrooms. In “Bringing the Coursebook to Life,” Brian explains the need for we teachers and educators to humanise and energise the textbooks we use in ways that allow students and learners to get more from their learning experiences by providing materials that are both relatable and stimulating. More importantly, perhaps, is that Brian then takes us through several techniques for doing just that - adapting and changing coursebooks into relatable and stimulating teaching tools.

Speaking of techniques, our second piece this issue is the first in a series by Sam Keith and Brian Cullen explaining the fundamentals of sound engineering, an area that, once mastered, can enable us to create better and more effective listening materials. Sam and Brian use their combined experience to go over the equipment needed and how to set it all up. They have thoughtfully provided a full list of the tools discussed at the end of the article.

Our final piece, this issue, is a reflective piece by Fiona Wall Minami detailing her experiences in being nominated for an award for innovation in English teaching. Fiona’s book, “Escape the Classroom” was published in March 2020; in the article, Fiona talks about the challenge of trying to both prepare for the requirements of the competition and promote her book with an international team during a global pandemic. Fiona will return next issue to let us know the results of her efforts and the results of the competition.

Lastly, as the new Publications Chair, I’d like to invite all readers to participate in this SIG and in this publication. We are always on the lookout for volunteers to help proofread and edit *Between the Keys*, and we are always on the lookout for new articles, interviews, techniques, and essays. For a full list of what we accept, please see our submission guidelines. We look forward to hearing from you.

# Bringing the Coursebook to Life

Brian Tomlinson (University of Liverpool, Anaheim University)

## Introduction

Coursebooks consist of lifeless words and illustrations on pieces of paper. Some of them are visually appealing, some of them are interesting but all of them (including mine) need bringing to life. For coursebooks to facilitate language acquisition and the development of communicative competence they need to interact with the minds of their learners and to help their learners to interact with others. In order to do this they need to be humanised and to be energised into life. By humanising I mean adapting the materials in the coursebook so that they respect the learners as individual, intelligent human beings and help them to exploit their capacity for learning through relevant, meaningful experience which connects to their lives and which engages them cognitively and affectively (for other definitions of humanising see Grundy, 2013; Pham, 2021; Tomlinson, 2013a). By energising I mean adapting materials so that they are more likely to stimulate learners' brains to be multidimensionally active and to stimulate learners to devote energy to being mentally, emotionally and physically on task. The more stimulated the brain is the more likely it is to process input into intake which facilitates durable and effective acquisition (Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2021).

## Why Do Coursebooks Need Humanising and Energising?

My analyses and evaluations of coursebooks for Tomlinson (2016, 2018) and Tomlinson and Masuhara (2013, 2018, 2021) reveal that many coursebooks:

- restrict the learners to intensive reading of or listening to short, simple, de-contextualised texts often contrived to illustrate a 'new' teaching point;
- feature such closed and shallow activities as true/false questions, matching, filling in the blanks, word substitution, sentence completion and closed comprehension questions (Tomlinson, 2018);
- restrict the learners to de-contextualised and purposeless practice of just-taught language points or to production activities which manipulate them to use just-taught language points.

None of these activities typically respect the learners as individual, intelligent human beings or help them to exploit their capacity for learning through relevant, meaningful experience which connects to their lives. None of these activities typically stimulate learners' brains to be multidimensionally active nor stimulate learners to devote energy to being mentally, emotionally and physically on task. And none of these activities typically match with what I would say are the three main humanistic principles of second language acquisition:

- rich, meaningful, comprehensible, embodied and recycled exposure to language in use;
- potential for affective and cognitive engagement;
- opportunities to use the language for purposeful communication.

Exposure to language in communicative use is a pre-requisite for language acquisition. To help learners to achieve effective and durable acquisition it needs to be rich in quantity and in quality, to be meaningful in the sense of connecting with the learners' lives, to be comprehensible in the sense of enabling sufficient understanding for the learners to achieve their purposes whilst still wanting to understand more, to be embodied in the sense of also communicating meaning through non-linguistic, extra-linguistic and contextual signifiers and to be recycled naturally at intervals in different contexts and ways. For this input to become intake learners need to be engaged both cognitively and affectively, that is to think and to feel while devoting focus and energy to the learning activity. For the intake to be acquired further, recycled exposure is required as well as opportunities to use language for communication in contexts in which the learners want and need to achieve purposeful outcomes.

Coursebooks which match the principles above are rare and are usually the products of dissatisfaction with available coursebooks and of national or individual initiatives. An example of a product of dissatisfaction and national initiative is *On Target* (1994), a coursebook for Namibian teenagers which was commissioned by the Ministry of Education in Namibia, was written in a week by a large team of local teachers and followed a humanistic, text-driven approach in which texts with the potential for meaningful, affective and cognitive engagement drove the activities rather than a language driven syllabus (see Tomlinson 2013; Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2018, 2021). An example of an individual initiative is that taken by Benevides, who was dissatisfied with the available commercial coursebooks, developed his own task-driven materials for facilitating communication in English in the workplace, got the materials published by a commercial publisher, secured the copyright from the publisher, set up his own publishers and revised, expanded and re-published his materials with Chris Valvona as Benevides and Valvona (2018). For more information about this self-published coursebook see the article by Brian Cullen in *Between the Keys* (2020, 28(1), 4-7).

### Why Do Commercial Coursebooks Not Match SLA Principles?

There are many reasons but I think the main ones are:

1. In most cases teachers are obliged to cover a curriculum which is driven by lists of language teaching points and want coursebooks which help them to do this.
2. In most cases teachers are preparing learners for examinations which assess their declarative knowledge of the target language and want coursebooks which help them to do this.
3. In many cases teacher training focuses on how to teach a language rather on how to facilitate language learning and teachers want coursebooks which help them to do this.
4. Because of the factors above a stereotypical coursebook has been developed which features the explicit teaching and practising of isolated language points.
5. Publishers are understandably very reluctant to risk deviating from the established coursebook norm and its stereotypical format is thus perpetuated ad infinitum.

### What Can Teachers Do to Humanise Their Coursebooks?

#### 1 Replace Sections of the Coursebook with Materials Driven by Humanistic Approaches

A number of recently developed pedagogical approaches are potentially humanistic but are rarely made use of in coursebooks probably because they lack face validity and constitute a risk for

publishers. I would recommend the following such approaches to use when replacing sections of the coursebook:

### **Text-Driven Approaches**

'A text-driven approach is a learner-centred, experiential approach in which a core authentic text which is selected for its potential to engage drives the activities in the classroom rather than a syllabus or a pre-determined language or skills teaching point.' (Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2021).

I would recommend sometimes replacing a dull and distant text in the coursebook with a text with the potential to engage your learners affectively and cognitively. I would then use that text to drive the activities in the following framework:

1. A **readiness activity** designed to activate the learners' minds in relation to the content of the text (e.g. visualising a wedding they have been to).
2. A **mental task** to perform (e.g. visualising the wedding described in the text) **whilst reading, listening to or viewing** the text so that they will focus on global understanding of the text rather than on micro-processing every word.
3. **Personal response questions** on the text designed to facilitate the development and articulation of their representation and/or interpretation of the text (e.g. drawing the wedding scene from the text; giving their explanation for the way the guests behaved).
4. **The writing of a continuation, version of, response to or localisation of the text** individually or in groups (e.g. a scene from the day after the wedding; an e-mail from a wedding guest to a member of the family who could not attend the wedding).
5. **Making discoveries about how a particular language feature is used** (e.g. reported speech) in the original text.
6. **Using the discoveries to make any revisions** they want to their texts before handing them in to the teacher for feedback.

The framework suggested above is described and exemplified in Tomlinson (2013b) and in Tomlinson and Masuhara (2018).

### **Task-Based Language Learning (TBLT)**

Task-based language learning in its strong form requires learners to make use of their existing linguistic resources in order to successfully complete a communicative task with a clearly defined outcome (e.g. persuading an international company to fund the development of a water saving device they have invented). Whilst working cooperatively on the task with other learners a learner will seek language which they need from peers and from the teacher and after completing the task the learner(s) will gain feedback from their teacher and peers on the effectiveness of their use of the L2. This is a form-focused in meaning-focused approach in which the learners' main focus is on successful task completion but in trying to achieve this they will also focus on form when they need to. It is also an approach with great potential for humanising a coursebook. Replacing a section of a coursebook with a task can increase the relevance, meaningfulness and potential for engagement of the coursebook, can give learners purposeful opportunities to use and to gain language and can increase the likelihood of facilitating the development of communicative competence.

For information about the theory and application of TBLT see Long (2015), Mackey, Ziegler and Bryfonski (2016), Masuhara and Tomlinson (2018) and Samuda, Van den Branden and Bygate (2018).

### **Problem-Based Teaching (PBT)**

PBT is a task-based approach in which the task consists of resolving a contextualised problem. I would recommend sometimes replacing the comprehension questions in the coursebook with a problem for the learners to solve based on the content of the text in the coursebook. For example, if a text is about water shortages groups of learners could be asked to invent a cheap and effective device for saving water. When I used such a task with a group of engineering students in a Japanese university it turned out to be cognitively engaging and challenging, affectively engaging (they had great fun, for example, performing their tv adverts for their device) and meaningful (as engineering students they often had to solve such problems on their course).

See Mishan (2013) and Ansarian and Teoh (2018) for surveys of the literature on problem-based approaches and for suggestions for classroom implementation.

### **Localising**

An obvious and often very successful approach is to replace texts and/or tasks which are cultural distant and meaningless to learners with those which are locally relevant and meaningful. See Pham (2021) for a report of a very successful humanisation of the coursebook project which involved replacing culturally distant texts in the coursebooks with locally relevant texts (e.g. texts on American films being replaced by texts on Vietnamese films).

### **Looking Out for the L2**

No classroom based course can be sufficient (Barker, 2010a, 2010b) and it is vital that learners are encouraged to look out for their target language in use outside the classroom. One way of ensuring this is to set a homework task which involves following up the topic or theme of a coursebook unit (e.g. after doing a unit on 'Entertainment' researching local entertainment attractions so as to be able to write a leaflet advertising them.). This could involve such activities as surfing the web, accessing newspapers and journals, befriending native speakers, interviewing people in the street interviewing owners of entertainment venues etc. Such activities are likely to facilitate acquisition because they are meaningful and engaging to the learners who have chosen to do them.

For discussion and demonstration of ways of getting learners to look out for their L2 see Tomlinson (2014) and Pinnard (2016).

Other approaches with the potential to humanise the coursebook include project approaches, drama approaches, language through literature approaches, Data-Driven Approaches, Action-Oriented Approaches and Content and Language Integrated Approaches (CLIL). See Tomlinson and Masuhara (2018, 2021) for details and examples of these approaches.

## **2 Perform their Coursebook**

A performance of the coursebook consists of a human enactment of the words on the page.

It is:

- live;
- in the classroom;

- sometimes augmented by props, visuals and sound effects.

Performing the coursebook can augment, enrich, embody and energise the coursebook. It can also achieve the exposure, engagement and opportunities for communication advocated in my three principles above. The performance can be by the teacher, by the students or by interaction between the teacher and the students.

An example of teacher performance of the textbook would be the teacher acting out the scene from a graphic novel depicted on page 45 of *Global Intermediate* (Clandfield & Benne, 2012) in which two soldiers are marching up and down on top of a wall separating two countries. They are guarding their homeland but one of them is not sure which side of the wall their homeland is on. The other one asserts that it is on their left but his colleague points out that they have got a problem. Rather than answer the closed questions in the coursebook the students in pairs work out what the problem is, come up with a solution and act it out to another pair (an example of learner performance). Another example of learner performance is the learners in pairs or as a whole class acting out a coursebook dialogue from the coursebook which their teacher has contextualised. One of my favourites is a rather tedious coursebook transactional dialogue in which a female customer is trying on shoes in a shoe shop. The dialogue is brought to life by the teacher informing the learners that the salesman and the customer have recently got divorced and the salesman did not know his ex-wife was a regular customer in the shop he has just started working in and the customer did not know her ex-husband now worked in the shop.

An example of an interactional performance would be what I did with the Korean folk tale on p. 28 of *Global Intermediate* (Clandfield & Benne, 2011). Half the class were told to act as Hungbu the hard working, generous son of a rich landowner who has recently died and left nothing to Hungbu and the other half play his lazy and selfish brother Nolbu, who has been left all his father's money. The teacher performs a dramatic reading of the story whilst the students mime their character's actions and gestures. Then instead of setting the True/False comprehension exercise in the coursebook the teacher interrogates the brothers about their characteristics and behaviour and they answer in character.

### 3 Make Small Changes to their Coursebook and the Ways They Use It

You could make very small creative changes to coursebook activities. For example, you could get students to find ways in which wrong answers could become right.

e.g. 1a on p. 49 of *English Unlimited Pre-Intermediate* (Tilbury et al., 2010) changes from 'a) In pairs, decide on the rules for a library. Complete the sentences with: can, can't, have to or don't have to.'

'6 You \_\_\_\_\_ keep quiet in the library.'

to:

'Use the words I give you to complete each of the sentences.'

e.g. '6 You \_\_\_\_\_ keep quiet in the library .....

Use 'can't' and 'because'.

You could also open up closed activities. For example, in *The Big Picture Intermediate* (Goldstein, 2012) on p. 41 in 4a the learners are asked to:

Complete the sentences with *already, always, ever, never* and *yet*.

1 I've ..... seen snow.'

This could be opened up as:

'Complete the following sentences about yourself:

I've already ..... but .....  
I've always ..... but .....  
I've never ..... but .....

You could also challenge your students to be creative by getting them to:

- i) draw their interpretation of a text rather than answering questions about it;
- ii) interview characters from a text before or after answering questions on it;
- iii) relocate and rewrite a text rather than answer questions on it;
- iv) continue a text before answering questions on it;
- v) add an extra think question for other learners to answer;
- vi) read only the comprehension questions and then write a text to answer them.

You can find these examples and others in Tomlinson (2015, 2018) and in Tomlinson and Masuhara (2018, 2021).

#### 4 Supplement Their Coursebook

One obvious way of humanising the textbook is to add to it texts and activities which involve the learner in understanding and using the L2 to make connections with their own lives, personalities and opinions. This could involve adding texts and/or activities which connect with the topic or theme of a unit (what I call an extension activity) or simply making additions which do not have any apparent connections with the unit. These additions could be made at the beginning or end of the unit. At the beginning they could be task-free activities which involve listening to the teacher telling a story or joke without having to answer any questions about it or readiness activities getting the learners to connect the topic or theme of the text to their lives. At the end of the unit an extension activity would add different perspectives for the learners to think about.

An example of a readiness activity done by the learners before going to the coursebook would be: Before getting students to do 7A in 5.1 'The advantages and disadvantages of modern technology' in *Speak Out Intermediate* (Clare & Wilson, 2012) add:

'See a picture in your mind of you using technology. Is the technology working well? Are you happy with it?'

'Tell a partner about the experience with technology which you saw pictures of in your mind.'  
(Tomlinson, 2015, pp. 26)

An example of an addition to the end of a unit would be:

An extension activity aiming to increase the learners experience of the topic of modern technology and to increase their opportunities for exposure to rich input and for purposeful communication.

After doing 5.1 'The advantages and disadvantages of modern technology' in *Speak Out Intermediate* (Clare & Wilson, 2012) the students could be given pages 20-21 of The New Review Section of the Observer newspaper of 30/08/15. This is a write up of an interview with Kentaro Toyama, once an enthusiastic supporter of the digital revolution but now the writer of a book warning against our reliance on technology.

#### 5 Design and Self-Publish Their Own Coursebook

One obvious but demanding course of action is for the teacher to develop their own materials and then to self-publish them as a coursebook for their institution, their area and maybe their country and beyond. One successful example of this is Benevides, M. and Valvona, C. (2018). *Widgets Inc: A task-based course in workplace English*. Atama-ii Books, a coursebook I referred to above. A less

successful example is a coursebook published in Japan as a manga, a great idea in my view as it satisfies such criteria as meaningfulness, relevance, engagement and recycling. Unfortunately though it did not achieve face validity and was not a commercial success.

My advice would be to form a large team with writers from different institutions so that ideas and monitoring can be shared and the coursebook can be trialled and hopefully sold in many institutions.

## 6 Do Something Completely Different

In situations where my students have been landed with and demotivated by a completely lifeless coursebook I have sometimes just abandoned it. In Vanuatu my students threw their coursebooks through the classroom window on my count of three and then spent a semester writing a novel each. In Saffron Walden we spent a term discussing, performing and reviewing a play by Tom Stoppard. In Liverpool my students brought their own books, magazines, comics etc for us to base activities on. And in Jakarta one of my in-service teachers got her students to bring texts with the potential to engage their peers and then designed relevant, meaningful and engaging activities driven by them.

## Conclusion

Coursebooks are never going to be relevant, meaningful and engaging for every learner or even every class. The writers do not know the learners and the publishers do not want to risk ruin by taking a chance on humanistic innovation. So it will always be the teacher's job to bring their coursebooks to life and we need to be humanistic, empathetic and creative in order to do so successfully.

## References

- Ansarian, L. & Teoh, M.L. (2018), *Problem-based language teaching and learning: an innovative approach to learn a new language*. Oxford: Springer.
- Benevides, M. & Valvona, C. (2018). *Widgets Inc: A task-based course in workplace English*. Atama-ii Books.
- Cullen, B. (2020). Transitioning from author to publisher. *Between the Keys*, 28(1), 4-7.
- On Target (1995). *Grade 10 English Second Language – Learner's Book*. Windhoek: Gamsberg Macmillan.
- Grundy, P. (2013). Humanistic language teaching. In M. Byram & A. Hu (Eds.), *Routledge encyclopedia of language teaching and learning* (pp. 322-325). Abingdon: Routledge.
- Long, M. (2015) *Second language acquisition and task-based language teaching*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Mackey, A., Ziegler, N. & Bryfonski, L. (2016). From SLA research on interaction to TBLT materials. In B. Tomlinson (Ed.), *SLA research and materials development for language learning* (pp. 103-118). New York: Routledge.
- Mishan, F. (2016). Comprehensibility and cognitive challenge in language learning materials. In B. Tomlinson (Ed.), *SLA research and materials development for language learning* (pp. 166-184). New York: Routledge.
- Pham, L. (2021). A comparative investigation into humanising ELT materials and its impact on learner interest and language performance: A case from Vietnam. Unpublished PhD. University of Auckland.
- Pinnard, L. (2016). Looking outward: Using learning materials to help learners harness out-of-class learning opportunities. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, 10(2), 133-143.

- Samuda, V., Van Den Branden, K. & Bygate, M. (Eds.). (2018). *TBLT as a researched pedagogy*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Tomlinson, B. (2013a). Humanising the coursebook. In B. Tomlinson (Ed), *Developing materials for language teaching* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., pp. 139-156). London: Bloomsbury.
- Tomlinson, B. (2013b). Developing principled frameworks for materials development. In B. Tomlinson (Ed), *Developing materials for language teaching* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., pp. 95-118). London: Bloomsbury.
- Tomlinson, B. (2015). Challenging teachers to use their coursebooks more creatively. In Maley, A. & Peachey, N. (Eds.), *Creativity in the English classroom*. London: British Council.
- Tomlinson, B. (2016). Achieving a match between SLA theory and materials development. In B. Tomlinson (Ed.), *SLA research and materials development for language learning* (pp. 3-22). New York: Routledge.
- Tomlinson, B. (2018). Making typical coursebook activities more beneficial for the learner. In D. Bao (Ed.), *Creativity and innovations in ELT materials development: Looking beyond the current design* (pp. 21-34). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Tomlinson, B. (2020). Is materials development progressing? *Language Teaching Research Quarterly*, 15, 1-20.
- Tomlinson, B. & Masuhara, H. (2013). Adult coursebooks. *ELT Journal* 67(2), 233-249.
- Tomlinson, B. & Masuhara, H. (2018). *The complete guide to the theory and practice of materials development for language learning*. Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Tomlinson, B. & Masuhara, H. (2021). *SLA applied: Connecting theory and practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

# Basic Sound Engineering for Creating Listening Materials - Part 1

Sam Keith (Sugiyama University)

Brian Cullen (Nagoya Institute of Technology)

Developing listening skills is an integral part of promoting language proficiency. At some point many materials writers find that they need to create audio recordings either as listening materials or to support other materials. If you are working with a large publisher, it is likely that they will take on this task, but if you are on your own or working with a small publisher with few resources, getting started with audio recording can be quite a challenge. This practical article — based on firsthand experience in sound-engineering and material design — will offer some tips and information in basic sound engineering for creating listening materials. While we touch on the creation of sound effects and music, this article is primarily focused on creating high-quality voice recordings for EFL learning materials. This is part 1 of a two-part article. Part 1 focuses on choosing and setting up your basic recording equipment and establishing a workflow. Part 2 goes into more detail on creating a high-quality sound through microphone use, compression, effects, gating, and other aspects of basic sound engineering.

## Basic Equipment

While it is possible to simply put your smart phone in front of you and press record, you can create and edit recordings of much higher quality and greater complexity if you have access to some basic recording equipment. Luckily, the price of equipment has fallen enormously and you can set up a high quality studio for a relatively small cost compared to years past. We list some popular brands at the end of this article.

Figure 1 and Figure 2 show two different options for common basic setups, one utilizing an audio interface and the other utilizing a USB microphone.

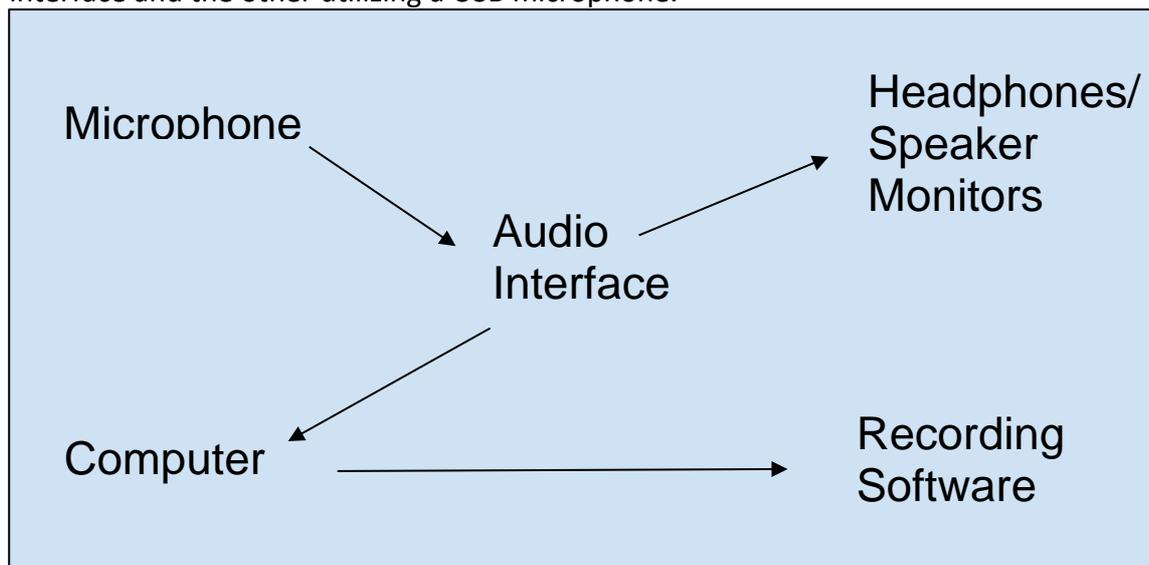
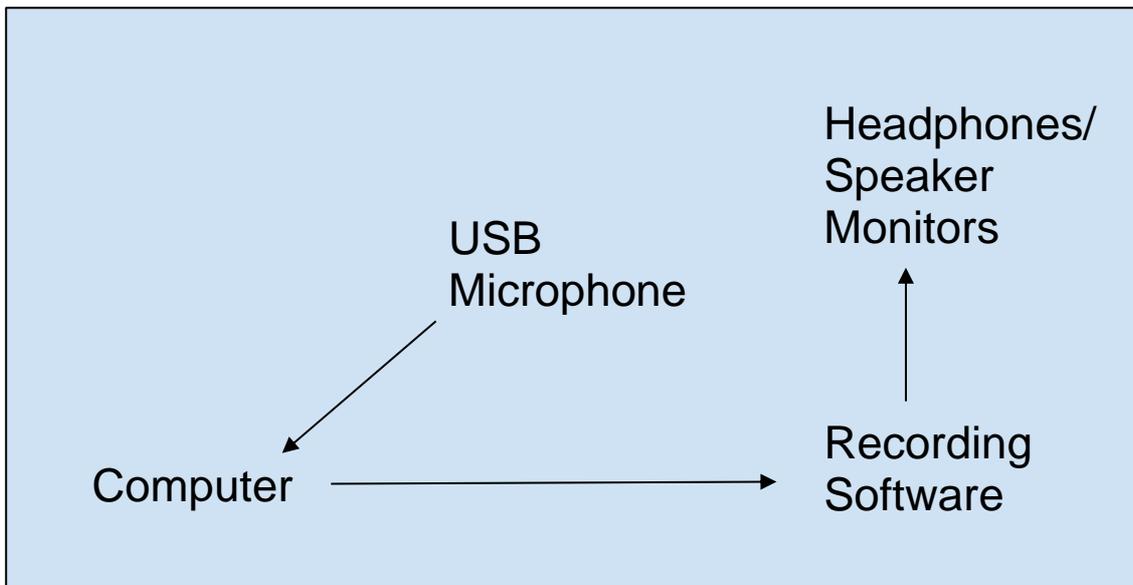


Figure 1. Microphone → Audio interface → Computer → Recording software



**Figure 2. (audio interface not required): USB Microphone → Computer → Recording software**

### Microphones

You will definitely need at least one microphone for any recording. For recording dialogues, having two microphones offers more flexibility, but is not absolutely necessary because the microphone can be placed between the speakers. The microphone produces an analog signal, which needs to be converted into a digital signal in order to be saved and edited on a computer. If you are using a USB mic (Figure 2), this conversion is carried out within the microphone. Otherwise, you will need an audio interface (Figure 1). An audio interface will give you much more flexibility than a USB mic and is the advised option if you are planning to create a lot of listening materials. Some advantages of an audio interface are the ability to add multiple microphones or other audio equipment such as an iPad, more easily change the input level of each microphone or audio signal, and more flexible monitoring options (listening to the audio that is being recorded or played back).

Two common types of microphones are dynamic mics and condenser mics. Dynamic microphones are the most commonly seen microphones in live music settings because the way they pick up sound is “directional” and helps eliminate incoming sound from unwanted sources. For vocal recordings, condenser mics are more commonly used because they tend to pick up a higher frequency range and in general, a condenser mic will give a better recording of voices.

Microphones have different pick-up patterns, such as *cardioid*, *figure 8*, and *omnidirectional* patterns. The pick-up pattern determines which sounds the microphone will accept and which it will reject. A cardioid pattern picks up only what is exactly in front of the microphone (such as the aforementioned “directional” quality of dynamic microphones). Most microphones, both dynamic and condenser, are cardioid or have a cardioid setting. A figure 8 pattern picks up what is directly in front of and directly behind the signal. An omnidirectional microphone picks up sound in all directions. At first glance, it may seem ideal to place a single omnidirectional mic in the middle of several speakers instead of one mic for each speaker. This may produce high sound quality in some situations, but the engineer must consider the room as well. Audio is highly influenced by the room where it is recorded, and the reason most engineers would opt against this technique is because the results may sound boomy and unbalanced. A lot of modern condenser microphones are *multipattern*, where the engineer can switch between several patterns. Dynamic microphones usually only have a cardioid pick-up pattern. For recording spoken word, it is generally best to use

a cardioid pattern microphone for each individual speaker. This will give a clearer sound and also enable you to edit the volume and other characteristics of each voice in your recording software, independently of the other voices.

### Audio Interfaces

An *audio interface* is a device for getting an audio signal in and out of the computer. They range in price from less than 10,000 yen to millions of yen. The audio interface is responsible not only for converting analog signal into digital, but also converting digital into analog so that the engineer and speakers can monitor what they are recording. In recent years, more expensive audio interfaces are specifically paired with certain software and often have extra computing power built in to ease the computing load of the computer itself and speed up processing. However, for basic vocal recordings such as the few mono tracks like those used in most listening materials, this additional processing support is probably unnecessary.

A few features that are likely to be built into any audio interface are: microphone or instrument input jacks, preamplifiers (preamps), phantom power, headphone jacks, monitor outputs, and a USB or firewire output. After a microphone is plugged into anything, it can be thought of like an electric guitar — it needs an amplifier. For microphones, this amp is always called a ***pre-amplifier***, or ***preamp*** for short. In professional recording studios, the preamps are usually completely separate from the interface and are usually as expensive as the microphone being used (if not far more). Engineers working in these studios are usually attempting to create an extremely specific sound and such equipment isn't necessary to record basic listening materials. The built-in preamps in most interfaces are more than adequate for this purpose.

***Phantom power*** is very simple to use — it needs to be turned on if the microphone is a condenser microphone. Using phantom power with a dynamic microphone isn't necessary, but will not cause any damage if accidentally left turned on.

As for the various outputs on the audio interface, the monitor outputs are used to route signals to external speakers and the headphone jacks are used for a single pair of headphones or a headphone splitter if there are multiple listeners. The USB/firewire output is the final link in the chain which finally brings the signal into the computer. Firewire has become all but obsolete and most new computers and interfaces do not support it. The majority of newer interfaces use USB 3 thunderbolt to connect the computer and the interface, although it's still not uncommon to encounter USB 2.0.

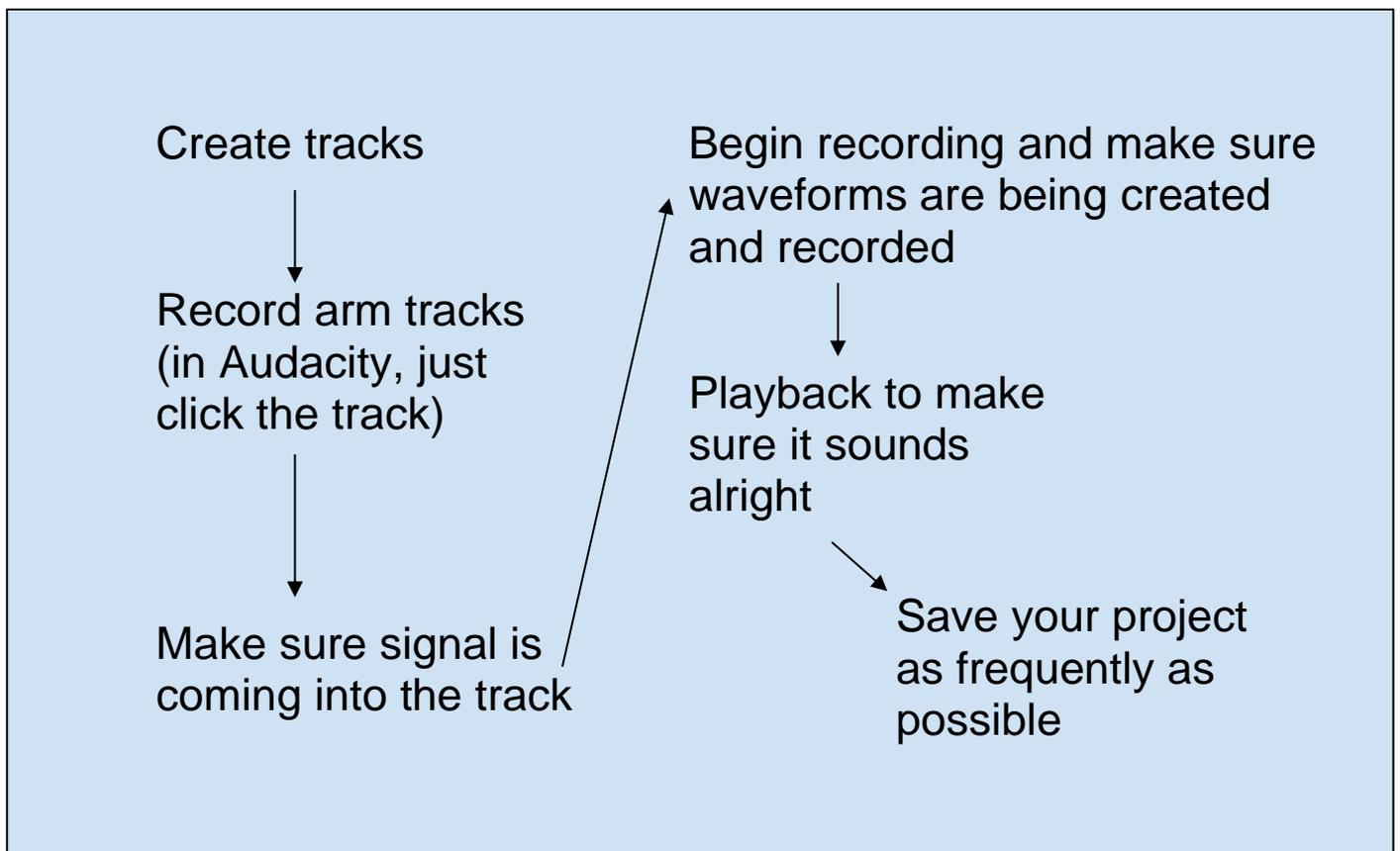
It is best to have a clear understanding of what every jack or knob does, but to go full circle, let's go back to the original example: Microphone (captures analog sound) → Audio interface (turns the analog sound into digital signal and allows for monitoring) → Computer → Recording software

Building on this basic process, the second example (Figure 2), which utilizes a USB microphone in lieu of an audio interface, becomes clear - the audio interface is *built into* the microphone. The advantage of having the interface built into the microphone is that it simplifies the process of getting the signal into the computer. The disadvantage is that it limits the engineer's ability to "dial in" exactly what they want with the various control parameters on the interface. A USB microphone can sound great but may require a bit more trial and error. The most common issues encountered in USB microphones are overestimating recording levels (which can result in peaking - see Figure 5) or underestimating recording levels (which results in a very weak signal going into

the computer.) Whether you choose to use an audio interface or a USB microphone, trial and error is important and you should take ample time to get the sound as clean as possible.

### Software

Once the analog microphone signal has been converted into a digital signal by either an audio interface or a USB microphone, it enters the computer and must be visible and editable. This is done via software known as **DAW software** (digital audio workstation). As with other audio components, prices range from free to several million yen. The DAW industry is in a constant state of innovation and makes extreme leaps in capability and affordability every year. Software functionality that was once very expensive and impossible to use without proper training can now be acquired virtually for free, and the basic functions can be learned on YouTube. A few examples of free software are Audacity, Garageband (for Mac only) and Reaper. For basic listening materials, it is unlikely that you'll need to utilize any more than the basic features of the software. Explaining the details of how to effectively use DAW software have filled books which are hundreds of pages long and cause frustration to inexperienced recording engineers across the globe on a daily basis. Again, keep in mind that creating listening materials is relatively simple — set up a simple workflow and have a system to follow such as shown in Figure 3. This will help to reduce confusion, frustration and unusable recordings.



**Figure 3. A basic workflow using Audacity as an example DAW**

The most common issue encountered in recording with a DAW is failing to get the signal into the computer. The microphone is set, lights are blinking on the interface, you made a new track, you arm the track (prepare it for recording), but no signal is coming in. In this case, it's best to go into **preferences** and experiment with different settings. For example, in Reaper, this would be options → preferences → audio → device. If all else fails, check Google or Youtube and you'll likely find

that you are not alone. After the signal is coming into the DAW, set a good **recording level** to ensure the sound is not peaking (see figure 5). It's best to keep a conservative level because the sound can always be brought up, but once it peaks it cannot be repaired.

Figure 4 and Figure 5 show some of the basic controls in two popular low-cost or free software packages, Audacity and Reaper. These offer an overview of the main controls for arming tracks, recording, playback, and editing. Explaining the details of these programs is beyond the scope of this article, so we suggest that readers download them and experiment while referring to the user manual and tutorial videos on YouTube.

Part 2 of this article goes into more detail about microphone usage, equalization (EQ), effects, compression, normalization, gating and other aspects of sound engineering that can take listening materials to a much higher level.

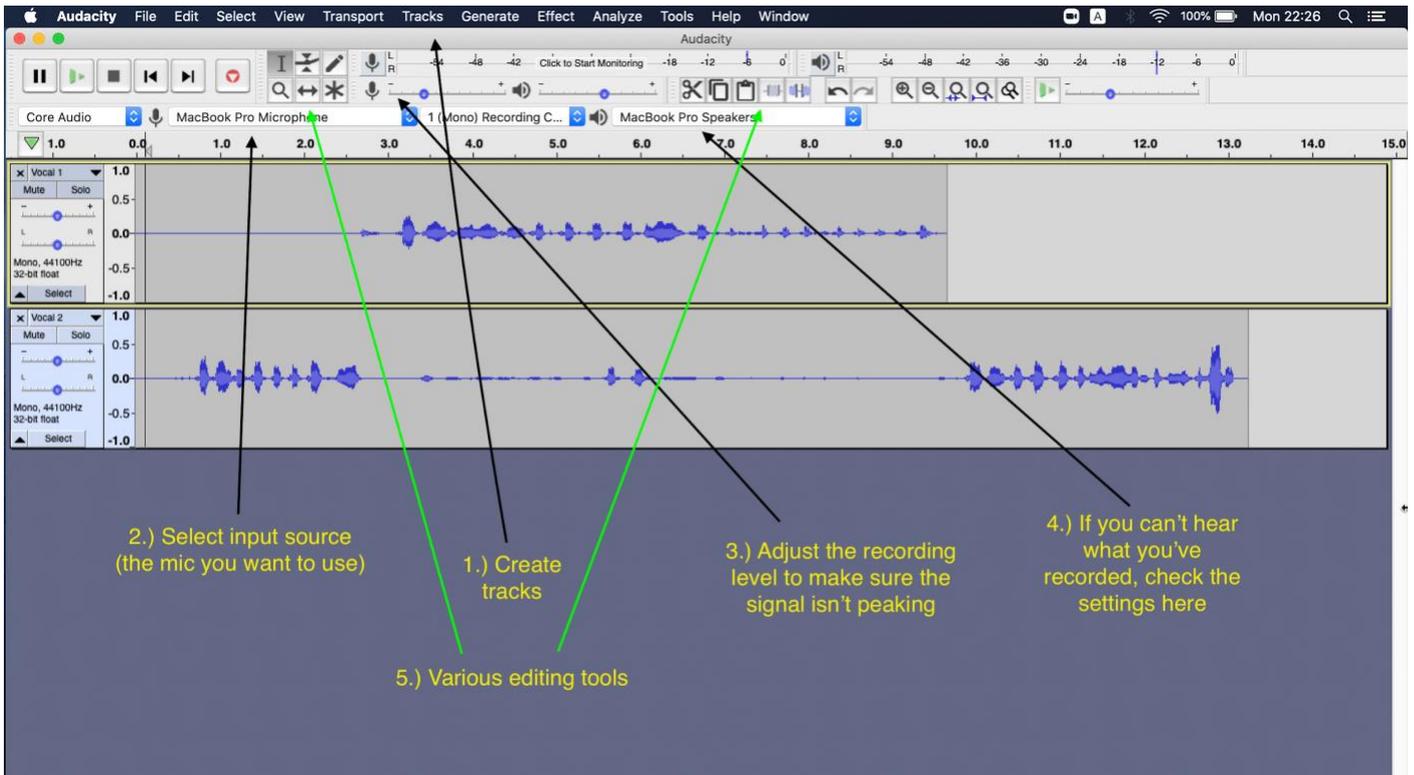


Figure 4. A few basic controls in Audacity

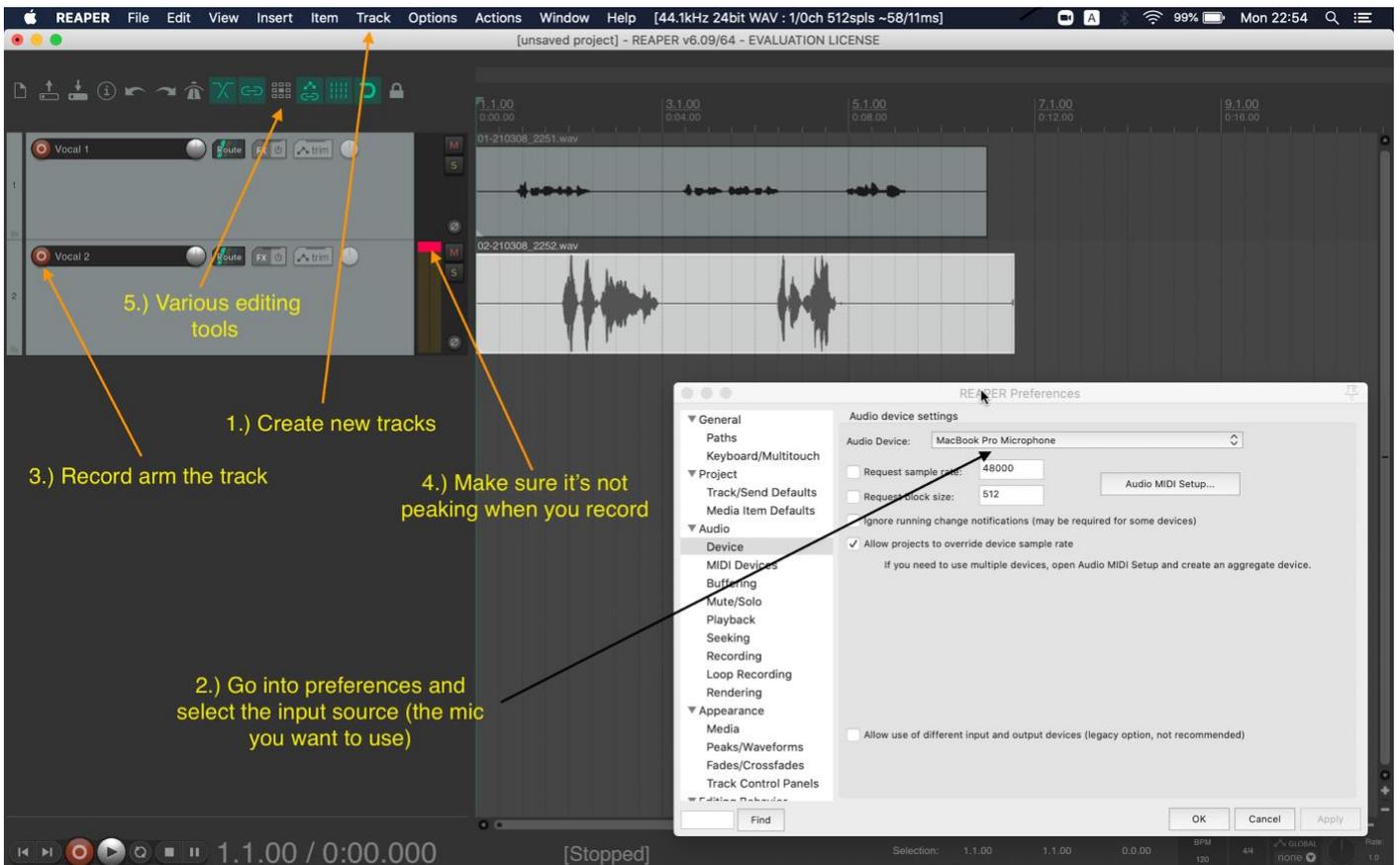


Figure 5: A few basic controls in Reaper

## Biodata

Sam Keith was trained in sound engineering at the University of Indianapolis and has produced various listening materials and musical recordings for commercial use. Brian Cullen has recorded, edited, and produced listening materials for many commercial textbooks.

## Information on Equipment and Software

### *Microphones*

Audio Technica AT2020 ~ ¥9,800

Rode NT1-A ~ ¥30,000

AKG C214 ~ ¥32,800

Shure SM7B ~ ¥44,800

### *USB Microphones*

Shure MV7 ~ ¥31,600

AudioTechnica AT2020USB+ ~ ¥14,670

Blue Yeti Series ~ ¥16,500

### *Audio Interface*

Roland Rubix Series ~ ¥19,000

FocusRite Scarlett Series ~ ¥15,000

MOTU ~ ¥31,000

Universal Audio Apollo Series ~ ¥72,000

## Software

1. Audacity is a free audio recording software and is likely to fill the needs of many people.  
<https://www.audacityteam.org/download/>
2. Reaper is free for evaluation purposes for 60 days. After that, you can continue to use it, but will be prompted to pay. It has a much steeper learning curve than Audacity. It is also capable of much more complex effects and editing and may be suitable for those willing to invest the time to learn it.  
<https://www.reaper.fm/>
3. Logic Pro is the most popular recording software for Mac (~¥20,000 for academic version)
4. Cubase is a popular recording software that is compatible for both Windows and Mac (~¥16,000 for academic version)

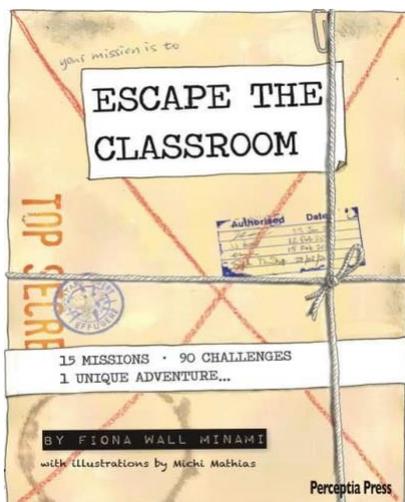
# The ELTons Part One: The Contender

Fiona Wall Minami (Britz English School / Kumamoto University)

“I think this could be an ELTons contender!” When these words first appeared on my computer screen in early 2019, I needed to do some urgent googling. Once I’d scrolled past all the Elton John references, I discovered that the ELTons were annual awards handed out by the British Council for innovation in English language teaching. Books, websites, apps, projects, platforms, publications and courses are all considered for the awards, which are given in five categories: Innovation in Learner Resources, Innovation in Teacher Resources, Excellence in Course Innovation, Local Innovation and Digital Innovation. There are also special commendations and Outstanding Achievement awards for pioneers and luminaries in the ELT industry.



My ‘contender’ was an escape room themed English language textbook, and in early 2019 it was far from complete, so thoughts of the ELTons were put to the back of my mind. Inspired by my passion for puzzles, quizzes and escape rooms, and love of TV shows such as *The Crystal Maze* and *Survivor*, *Escape the Classroom* aimed to get language learners communicating as they teamed up on immersive puzzle-filled missions. The tasks would include cutting up pages of the book to solve word puzzles, breaking codes hidden in the periodic table, discussing one-way trips to new planets and playing deduction games to improve detection skills.



In March 2020, *Escape the Classroom* was finally published, just as the world was heading into lockdown. Any thoughts of a book launch had to be put on hold; there would be no conferences or book fairs, and educators worldwide were scrambling to adapt to emergency remote teaching. I was one of them, completely unfamiliar with Zoom, and not sure how I could successfully get my university students to escape the classroom when we could barely leave our own homes. After a rough start, the weekly escape missions became something to look forward to. I received positive feedback from students who said that the ninety minutes spent ‘escaping’ really did give them some escapism, a chance to make friends and to forget about their stress.

Almost a year later, the announcement for the 2021 ELTons was made, and together with my publisher and illustrator, it was agreed that we would send in a submission. It is a vigorous and demanding process, most likely exacerbated by the pandemic, requiring applications to be submitted electronically with only one image of the product allowed in the initial stage. This year there were over 180 applicants from 50 countries, and this field was gradually reduced, through several rounds of judging, to a final shortlist of 29. The finalists were announced in July, with the award ceremony originally scheduled to take place online in October, and then postponed to November, allowing for a hybrid live ceremony with remote participation for finalists unable to make it to the red carpet event in London.

When the finalists were revealed, and *Escape the Classroom* was amongst them, it was a moment of delight, relief, exhilaration and a little panic about the next series of challenges. Being able to talk about something I'd kept a closely guarded secret for months was wonderful, and seeing the competition we were up against, it really hit me that our tiny team of three had accomplished quite a lot just reaching the final stage. On a personal level, as someone who has often struggled with self-doubt, to get international recognition for my work meant a great deal. I was also told that the prestige of having that 'ELTons finalist' sticker on the corner of my book, and the buzz that the awards generated would make a huge difference in terms of publicity, and I was keen to find out if that was really the case.

Over the summer, as the judging went into its final phase, the *Escape the Classroom* team set to work in preparation for the ceremony. All the finalists were tasked with creating a 30 second promotional video showcasing our innovative products while attempting to satisfy the edicts of the British Council, which this year is focused on promoting inclusion and diversity. The videos would be released in the run-up to the big event, and would also feature during the reading of nominations throughout the ceremony. With our team based in Japan and the UK, never having met in person, and with no experience in this field, it was another new challenge. We agreed that rather than having a talking head describing the book, we would take a different approach, highlighting the fun and escapist elements of the book with James Bond style background music, clacking typewriter keys and intriguing images of some of the pages.

Meanwhile, I set to work as my own social media manager, with a long to-do list. Having experienced the disappointment of a previous book failing to receive much attention, I was full of determination to make the most of the opportunities the nomination presented. I set up a Goodreads author account; tried to become more active on Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn; and worked on securing distribution for the book outside Japan. After much perseverance this came to fruition and inquiries and orders started to reach us from Vietnam, Austria, Spain, France, Chile, Ukraine, Russia and Mexico. At a time when overseas travel was close to impossible, knowing that *Escape the Classroom* was making its way to all of these countries was absolutely thrilling. The book also popped up on the back of the English Books Japan catalogue, started to receive some reviews on Amazon, and I gradually gained more experience in presenting at online conferences and giving interviews.

At the time of writing, the ELTons are just a few days away. While the other two members of the *Escape the Classroom* team are getting ready to hit the red carpet in London, I've been learning how to set up a virtual finalist's booth and wondering how I'll manage to stay awake until 4am on a Tuesday morning. Zoom briefings have helped prepare finalists around the world for the event, which includes pre- and post-ceremony interviews and speed networking sessions. Win or lose, I'll be back to write about the whole experience at a later date.

### Biodata

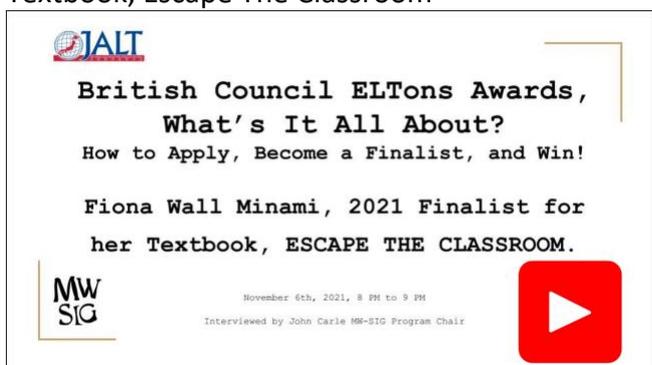
**Fiona Wall Minami** is originally from the UK and arrived in Japan in the mid 1990s with a degree in Modern Languages from Durham University. She is based in Kumamoto where she has run her language school, Britz, for over twenty years. She also teaches part-time at Kumamoto University. Fiona began her writing career as co-author of three Asahi Press textbooks: *A Taste of English: Food and Fiction*, *A Flavor of English: Cinema and Cuisine*, and *Aspects of Love in Fiction*. Her first solo textbook, *In the Driver's Seat*, was published by Perceptia Press in 2016 and her second,

*Escape the Classroom*, published in 2020, is a 2021 British Council ELTons finalist for Innovation in Learner Resources.

***Escape the Classroom*** is an English communication textbook aimed at university students as well as advanced high school students and adult learners. Using the theme of escape rooms, every unit of the book is actually a 'mission' and students have to cooperate with their teammates to solve puzzles, break codes and make their escape. This occasionally involves cutting up pages of the book while negotiating with aliens, rescuing a trapped prince, solving crimes and shopping for a demanding chemistry professor.

Video Link:

British Council ELTons Awards, What's It All About? Fiona Wall Minami, Finalist 2021 for her Textbook, *Escape The Classroom*



<https://youtu.be/YG5So3g4tow>