

Syllabuses & Coursebooks

Syllabuses & Coursebooks

- Writers and course designers have to take a number of issues into account when designing their materials. Once they have a clear idea of how their theories and beliefs about learning can be translated into appropriate activities, they will have to think about what topics to include.
- This will be based on perceptions of what students find engaging, what research shows in this area, and on the potential for interesting exploitation of the topics they might select.
- It will also be necessary to consider what kind of culture the material should reflect or encourage, and to ensure some kind of appropriate balance in terms of gender and the representation of different groups in society, racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic.
- Writers and course designers also have to decide what language varieties they wish to focus on or have represented, and they need to adopt a position on how authentic the language should be, especially at beginner levels.
- Once these decisions have been taken, coursebooks writers and language program designers can then turn their attention to the central organizing strand of their materials, namely the syllabus.

Syllabus Design

- Syllabus design concerns the selection of items to be learned and the grading of those items into an appropriate sequence. Every syllabus needs to be developed on the basis of certain criteria, such as 'learnability' and 'frequency', which can inform decisions about selection and ordering.

1- Syllabus design criteria :

When designers put syllabuses together, they have to consider each item for inclusion on the basis of a number of criteria. This will not only help them to decide if they want to include the item in question, but also where to put it in the sequence.

a- Learnability :

Some structural or lexical elements items are easier for students to learn than others. Thus we teach easier things first and then increase the level of difficulty as the students' language level rises. Learnability might tell us that, at a beginning level, it is easier to teach uses of *was* and *were* immediately after teaching uses of *is* and *are*.

b- Frequency :

It would make sense, especially at beginning level, to include items which are more frequent in the language, than ones that are only used occasionally by native speakers..... *see* is used more often to mean *understand*....(*e.g. I see*) than it is to denote vision.

c- Coverage :

Some words and structures have greater coverage (scope of use) than others. Thus we might decide, on the basis of coverage, to introduce the *going to* future before the *present continuous* with future reference, if we could show that *going to* could be used in more situations than the present continuous.

d- Usefulness:

The reason that words like *book* and *pen* figure so highly in classrooms (even though they might not be that frequent in real language use) is because they are useful words in that situation.

2- Different syllabuses :

There are different syllabuses

a- The grammar syllabus :

This the commonest type of syllabus, both traditionally and currently. A list of items is sequenced in such a way that the students gradually acquire a knowledge of grammatical structures, leading to an understanding of the grammatical system.

b- The lexical syllabus :

It is possible to organize a syllabus on the basis of vocabulary and lexis to create a lexical syllabus (the vocabulary related to topics...e.g. art, clothes, crime). A problem with lexical syllabuses is the relationship between lexis and grammar.

c- The functional Syllabus :

A functional syllabus might look like this:

- Requesting
- Offering
- Inviting
- Agreeing and disagreeing

The syllabus designer then chooses (ways of expression) for each function.

For example, for offering, the designer could choose from the following:

Would you like to.....?

Do you want some help?

I'll help you if you want.

Let me give you a hand.

I'll do that.....

d- The situational Syllabus :

A situational syllabus offers the possibility of selecting and sequencing different real-life situations rather than different grammatical units, vocabulary topics, or functions.

A situational syllabus might look something like this:

- At the bank
- At the supermarket
- At the travel agent
- At the restaurant

Where students have specific communicative needs, organizing teaching material by the situations which students will need to operate in is attractive, since the syllabus designer will be able to define the situation, the likely participants, and communicative goals with some certainty. (Business & tourism students vs. students of general language)

e- The topic-based syllabus :

Another framework around which to organize language is that of different topics (e.g. weather, sport, music). The weather topic, for example, can be subdivided into items such as the way weather changes, weather forecasting, weather and mood, and the damage that weather can cause.

f- The task-based syllabus:

A task-based syllabus lists a series of tasks, and may later list some or all of the language to be used in those tasks. (India experience). Six task types can be used with almost any topic. These are: listing, ordering and sorting, comparing, problem solving, sharing personal experience, and creative tasks. As with situations and topics, it is difficult to know how to grade tasks in terms of difficulty.

Choosing Coursebooks

Here are some Criteria for the assessment of coursebooks:

- 1- Price
- 2- Availability
- 3- Layout & design
- 4- Instructions
- 5- Methodology
- 6- Syllabus type, selection and grading
- 7- Language study activities
- 8- Language skill activities
- 9- Topics
- 10 Cultural acceptability
- 11 Usability
- 12 Teacher's guide