A Short Guide to Teachers as Authors of Student Readings

Keith Lane

On occasion, if not frequently, teachers are called upon by circumstances or school policy to be authors of course reading materials for their non-native English speaking students. The need for this teacher role is perhaps more prevalent in a topic based course for non-native speakers where suitable reading materials are not handy. Such courses can include elective courses at the high school level, discussion courses in continuing education provided by private teachers, language schools, and public sponsors, and in content-based courses taught in colleges and professional academies. Additionally, many teachers prefer to write at least some of their own material. Such material has the benefit of being written with the particular student audience in mind. Teachers know their students and their own teaching goals better than anonymous writers, and therefore have a better chance of creating suitable text and adjusting text based on the reactions of their students.

Topic-based instruction is a rich and promising endeavor in language education. After all, mature bilinguals are more likely to need abilities to communicate about real world topics than abilities to explain grammar. However, material that is opaque to the students can do more damage than good. Teachers wanting to make use of current events as topics, for example, might feel very frustrated by the attempt to use unedited excerpts directly from the newspapers, magazines and encyclopedia commonly used by native speakers. Because the material is not written with the limitations of lower English proficiencies in mind, students are more likely to spend their attention translating words than actually reading. College teachers wanting to teach a traditional subject area in English often meet with the same frustration. Although students might find the prospect of learning English in the context of exploring interesting topics very appealing, motivation can wane when students feel defeated by the materials they are given.

This is not an argument for avoiding topical instruction nor an argument against a reliance on using background readings for it. Reading is an important aspect of a mature bilingualism and can be best nurtured by establishing an experience of success and satisfaction. Teachers as authors can take the situation in hand and modify the language of a discourse to make it accessible.

The purpose of this paper is to suggest a number of guidelines which can help teachers write material for students with lower English proficiencies. The underlying belief is that, despite the additional effort involved with this approach, teacher-authored reading materials about interesting topics are potentially powerful learning opportunities. These guidelines will involve priorities, selection of vocabulary, use of grammar, organization and cohesion, and graphic features such as font, layout, and use of visuals aids.

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Consider Establishing a Reading Habit as the First Priority

Although the name of the course might be "Current Events" or "American Literature," I advise teachers to consider the substance of their writing as secondary to the students' acts of reading. That is, the primary goal ought to be the formation of basic reading fluency and reading motivation among the students. According to Krashen (1993) and Day and Bamford (1998) nothing contributes more to the development of reading skill than time spent reading what are, for the learners, readable materials. They cite also the extensive evidence for strong effects of large volumes of reading on the development of other areas of language use: vocabulary, grammar, writing, spelling, and linguistic competence. Teachers who conceive of their duty firstly in terms of teaching a body of content are apt to place unrealistic demands on the power of their writing to convey that content. Teachers who conceive of their duty firstly in terms of teaching students are often more effective because, by establishing the conditions for improvement in the students themselves, they affect learning far beyond the parameters of individual semesters.

This is why my first suggestion relates more to the reader rather than the topic. If lack of practice more than anything defines the poor reader, the teacher-author wants to produce materials that can and will be read. Ignoring for the moment student motivation, it may be possible for teachers to force students to 'read' what teachers put in front of them, but this does not guarantee that the information will be digested in the conventional sense of reading. It also does not ensure the formation of skills for doing so. To demonstrate this, we should consider how unpracticed readers read. Waring (1997) describes the novice reader's procedures in this way:

> A learner beginning to read in a second language starts by looking at each letter of each word to decode the word, and keeps each word in working (short-term) memory while the next word is processed. By the time she gets to the end of the line, the first word can easily be forgotten and very little meaning of the text is retained. (p. 9)

Varying levels of this conflict between limited short-term retention and integration with schema are inherent in reading. Until a student has enough competence to read words fast enough, she will have difficulty processing the meaning of sentences. Until she has the competence to read sentences easily enough, she will have trouble integrating them into a whole related to a developing thesis. The spacing of the following paragraph attempts to simulate the process of slow reading:

The   territorial   dispute   between   Japan and   the   Soviet   Union   over   the   four   islands, that   is,   the   Habomais,   Shikotan,   Kunashiri, and   Etorofu,   that   lie   off   the   northeastern tip   of   Hokkaido   has   been   one   of   the principal   stumbling   blocks   in   the   relations between   the   two   countries   since   the   end   of World   War   II.

Reading like this is too great a liability to be ignored because, until students get beyond this stage, attempts to use reading materials to convey ideas and information will largely be futile. That is why the first purpose of giving students

reading ought to be getting students used to reading. This means they reach a state in which they are able to complete the reading of sentences quickly enough to interpret their meaning. Sentence level interpretation is a skill that requires practice as well, not an automatic condition of efficient word recognition. Students need to have regular reading practice at a suitable and sustainable level; if all their reading is subject to recursive stop and start again patterns of guessing in context, translation, and consulting dictionaries, then they are never developing a sustainable reading ability and speed. Until learners are able to complete sentences efficiently enough, the conditions for sentence level interpretation are unlikely to exist, and learners will naturally rely on slower but more immediately promising processes of word-to-word level translations instead. In order that students develop the ability to interpret directly from their readings, it is important that teacher-authors do not mistakenly create the conditions in which students have an incentive to avoid practicing that same skill.

So far we have discussed the importance of helping students become efficient and comfortable readers. The essence of this endeavor is to give students something they can and will read. A preliminary suggestion is to limit the length of readings to a few pages that can be read and digested in a single sitting. When in doubt as to the amount that the students can comfortably process, it is better to err on the side of brevity initially. Gradually increasing the length of readings as the students become more comfortable and faster readers is much more satisfying to teachers and students than starting with an overly ambitious and unsustainable goal. Teacher-authors should find out, together with the students, what they can do rather than what they cannot, and then build from there. The next suggestions discuss how we can achieve this purpose by our careful use of prose. These suggestions include selective use of vocabulary, attention to sentence length, the use of cohesive devices, and clear rhetorical organization.

Control the Vocabulary Range Carefully

Our discussion has assumed a non-fluent familiarity with vocabulary (helping to account for the slow reading rates) but not a complete lack of familiarity with vocabulary. As language teachers know such an expectation is unrealistic. There always seem to be words students just do not seem to know. Teachers often like to use the dichotomy of "knowing" a word and "not knowing" a word, but reality is more complicated in the sense that there are various levels of knowing and not knowing words; Coady, Carrell, and Nation (1985) distinguish three different vocabulary recognition levels.

- sight vocabulary—immediately recognized with no conscious effort.
- context recognition—recognized in a familiar context.
- context inference—possibly recognized by inference to a contextual usage.

Having to identify words, rather than recognizing them immediately, requires time and draws on limited short-term memory. Having to analyze the possible meanings of words draws on still more. Now, consider the consequences of reference to the dictionary. The student must hold the word form in short-term memory accurately enough and for enough time to locate it in the dictionary.

Encountering several meanings, she must retain these in short-term memory, one-by-one probably, to compare and analyze them against the context in the source text.

Whenever students undertake such intensive word identification activities, much of the preceding discourse is likely to be forgotten and comprehension of the subsequent discourse is subject to the processes of an overtaxed mind. Essentially, words which are reacted to with immediate familiarity help create context; words whose interpretations are subject to conscious efforts instead rely on context. It would be best if the vast majority of the words in a reading were recognized immediately, so that enough context exists for proper interpretation of the few others. It makes considerable sense to rely on the words of highest frequency since those are the ones students are most likely to continually have exposure to, learn, and use to create context. Carroll, Davies, and Richman (1971) identify a sight vocabulary of the 2,000 most common words as an initial first goal since 80% of a typical text is comprised of these. There are other frequency lists such as West (1953) and Dale (Chall & Dale, 1995). I have created the following example to demonstrate the effect of reading when, according to West's list, only the 2,000 most common words are identifiable:

Conditions Of Iraq Before The Ινυασιον Of Kuwait

IRAQ was a ρελατιυελψ developed and rich country. The living standards were high. Λιτεραχψ was very high by ρεγιοναλ standards, goods and services were πλεντιφυλ and affordable. Iraq had good relations with Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and the USA, and most of the world supported Iraq in its war with Iran (1980-1988).

A 2,000 word sight vocabulary should be considered a point of departure. Clearly an 80% recognition rate might be adequate for native speakers to construct a context around, given a topic of sufficient familiarity, but a failure to recognize the meaning of 20% of the text for a non-native reader can be critical, especially when those are embodied in key sentences and phrases. For this reason, establishing a thorough familiarity with the most common words is a preliminary goal and one that can be accomplished in content reading by teacher-authors who purposely monitor and scrutinize their word choices to include primarily those words and to delay the introduction of others. Decisions to contradict this advice should be purposeful with the intention to devote some teaching-learning time to troublesome items. Teacher-authors should also expect that comprehension will be more ambiguous as a result. Although the teacher-author naturally wants students to be exposed to and learn a lot of new words, that is a good way to teach a lot of words very poorly rather than a smaller number of words well. Even a very simplified vocabulary range will provide enough vocabulary practice for novice readers.

A feature of the most common vocabulary should be kept in mind — they typically have extremely varied meanings. This variance in meaning partly accounts for their frequency and utility. Perhaps words with variant meanings should not be avoided but whenever possible accounted for and disambiguated in context. This can be done more effectively when the occurrence of other unfamiliar vocabulary is carefully minimized. It is also important to avoid excessive colloquial and idiomatic use of these common words when the meanings are resistant to literal interpretation. A folksy register is not naturally easier for students. And figurative meanings, even when students are fairly comfortable with the common literal meanings of the words, are hard to interpret. *Car*, *round*, and *bend* are common enough words, but

when *cars round the bend* semantic and syntactic relations become skewed — an adjective (round) becomes a verb and a verb (bend) becomes a noun. Similarly, Williams and Dallas (1984, p. 207) report that when *boxes block corridors* it is hard for Hong Kong secondary students to reconcile this with their understanding of *blocks* as things, like *concrete blocks* and *apartment blocks*.

Appendix 1 shows the effect of substituting common vocabulary for less common. *Territorial dispute,* for example, has been replaced with *border disagreement; principal stumbling block* has been replaced with *main problem.* These changes have made the reading slightly more readable. However, a lot more adjustment needs to be made in order to make this text accessible to novice readers. We turn now to the issue of sentence length and grammar.

Use Short, Simple Sentences

The ideas behind readability formulas are good rules of thumb for the teacher-author. These formulas are indirect measures of the difficulty of text based on the processing constraints of word difficulty and sentence length. Some of these measures, like the Dale-Chall Readability Formula, compare words against a list to determine difficulty (Chall & Dale, 1995); others, like Fry's Graph for Estimating Readability (Fry, 1968, 1977), determine word difficulty as a product of the number of syllables in words. A reading suitable for American eighth-grade readers would have about eight sentences per 100 words, and the words would be divided into about 122 syllables.

Fry Graph for estimating Reading Ages (in years)

Average number of **syllables** per 100 words
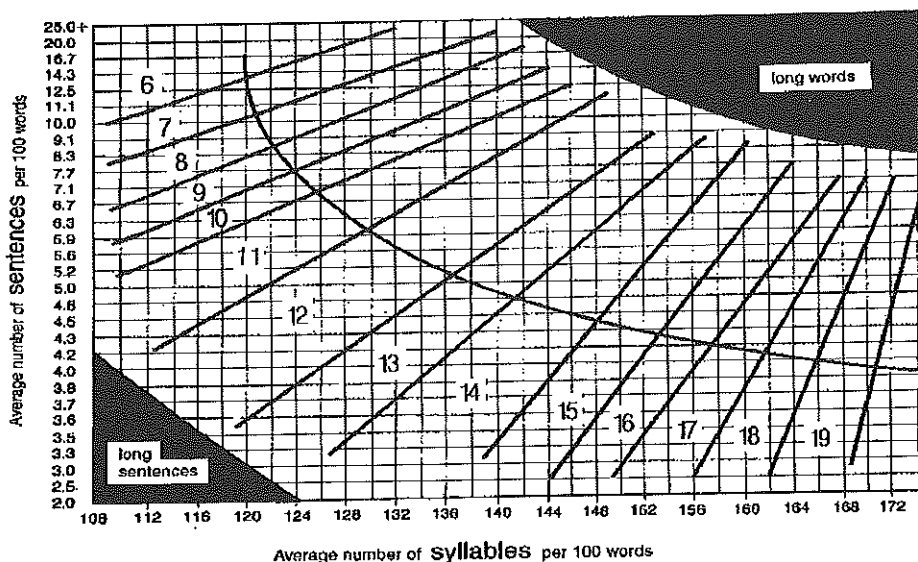
Fry's method was intended to provide an easier method for determining readability than was afforded by checking a list to determine the difficulty of each word (Johnson, 1998). The job is made even easier today by the inclusion of readability measures in word-processing software. Microsoft Word 5.1, for instance, includes the Flesch-Kincaid Formula which determines difficulty as a measure of

the average number of words per sentence and the average number of syllables per word and converts these to a grade level.

According to Flesch-Kincaid measure, the preceding paragraph was readable at a 15 grade level. Since the typical Japanese high school graduate does not have a reliable familiarity with the 3,000 words in the Chall-Dale word list, words known by the typical fourth-grade native English speaker, it would be unreasonable to expect smooth reading at a level beyond grammar school complexity, even accounting for the additional maturity and world experience of such students. Naturally, sophisticated topics call for sophisticated (long) words and sophisticated associations (long sentences), but the teacher-author should do his best to reduce the strain on the students. Reducing the length of sentences is one very effective way to do this.

Sample 3 of Appendix 1 shows the result of shortening sentences and vocabulary. The measured difficulty decreases dramatically from nearly 25 to around 8, meaning that an average junior high-school native-speaker can be expected to read it well. Obviously, changing sentence length often involves more than merely exchanging commas for periods. In the case of sample 3, *since the end of World War II*, has been moved to an earlier position so that it remains part of the first sentence.

So far we have discussed sentence level solutions to writing materials for students. These solutions have involved selecting words which are more likely to be recognized and using shorter sentences which are more likely to be properly digested. However, we must realize that reading at the sentence level is only half the battle. Articles, reports, essays and even stories, involve the development of ideas and their integration. In Appendix 1 sample 3, for example, it is entirely likely that a novice reader, even if she finds decoding the sentences relatively easy, will fail to understand the paragraph's intent—that the future of Japanese-Russian relations will involve the territorial problem. In order to address this concern, we should turn our attention to the issues of cohesion and rhetorical organization.

Use Clear Essay Structures with Plenty of Cohesive Devices

Although the overwhelming efforts of novice readers is at the sentence level, full comprehension is not possible when students fail to connect the meanings of sentences together within and beyond paragraph levels. Teachers can help them to do that by making the relationships between elements as clear as possible. Teacher-authors can best do that by using clear organization, including explicit thesis statements and topic sentences, and by making a conscious attempt to provide cohesive devices.

Well-organized and cohesive texts can have the effect of changing student reading methods positively. Many students are conditioned to refer to a text as an accumulated body of words and sentences for lexical identification and grammatical analysis. Teaching them to focus instead on understanding the main points and supporting arguments is not likely to succeed when these are buried deeply in paragraph structure, extended vaguely over several sentences, or only hinted at. In composition classes, we regularly teach students to use clear introductory paragraphs, topic sentences, and concluding paragraphs because it helps make the ideas clearer to the reader. We should heed that advice ourselves. Having done so,

instruction in identifying topics and evidence in the reading, and discussing these, can proceed as a rewarding activity. Failure to provide clearly organized text probably reinforces student attention to minutiae instead.

Urquhart (1984) demonstrates how the organization of material affects its comprehension. In this study, native English speakers and non-native speakers read materials ordered rhetorically by time and space. The researcher manipulated the texts so that they corresponded to or failed to correspond to traditional rhetorical advice. One of the items used was a newspaper article originally ordered in reverse chronological order. (The article reported the failure of a climbing expedition, and then reported the events that had preceded the failure.) What Urquhart found was that native speakers and non-native speakers alike depended on the structure of standard rhetoric to form firm enough ideas in their minds so that the information could be recalled accurately later. The non-native speakers relied more, not less, on the clarity of rhetoric. They are much more likely to resort to the default understanding that what is read first occurs first and what is presented second is most proximal to that.

Carrell (1984) also found an effect in comprehension and recall on the basis of rhetorical clarity. In this case, more "tightly" organized patterns—comparison, causation, and problem/solution—were subject to better recall than mere collections of descriptions. Interestingly, however, the subjects were often only vaguely aware of the discourse patterns they relied on. Those subjects demonstrating a greater awareness of rhetoric performed significantly better. Carrell, Pharis, and Liberto (1989) found that teaching reading strategies for recognizing rhetorical structure did have a positive effect on reading measures, especially on questions with open-ended (rather than multiple choice) question forms. The significance is that clearly organized writings help our students passively recognize the relationships of information over an entire text. Secondly, that clearly organized writings enable teachers to teach, and students to study, the skills of higher order reading processes.

The careful use of cohesive devices, particularly clear and unambiguous transitional phrases, can enhance the effect of effective rhetorical structure. Transitional phrases help to disambiguate the relation of new sentences to others in the text. To encourage the development of fluent reading, beyond sentence boundaries, it is clearly beneficial to have this bridge. Firstly, transitions can explain where new sentences relate, whether to an example in a proximal sentence or to the broader idea of a thesis statement in the introductory paragraph. Secondly, a transitional phrase can clarify how the information relates. Even novice readers typically know some common transitional phrases, such as *for example* and *on the other hand*, but there are many others which are less known and exposure to these can benefit the students.

Comments in this paper generally infer that a minimalist approach to writing for students is better: shorter readings, shorter sentences, and fewer unfamiliar vocabulary. However, there is a contradiction between the advice for both sentence simplicity and brevity on the one hand, and liberal use of transitional phrasing on the other. The elaborative qualities of transitional phrases, of course, add to the length and complexity of sentences, paragraphs, and readings. On the other hand, where readers are intended to make those associations between sentences anyway, it is probable that transitional phrases aid comprehension. Probably even more cognitive resources are required to make the proper associations without the aid of

explicit transitional cohesion. To alleviate this contradiction, we should restate the premise: less is generally better but *not* always better.

Yano, Long, and Ross (1994), for instance, argue in favor of sentences which are elaborated; that is, instead of merely simplifying all the words, add more detail in order that students can better understand the words in the context of the sentences in which they appear. These examples demonstrate the approach (p. 193):

1. NS baseline version:

Because he had to work at night to support his family, Paco often fell asleep in class.

2. Simplified version:

Paco had to make money for his family. Paco worked at night. He often went to sleep in class.

3. Elaborated version:

Paco had to work at night to earn money to support his family, so he often fell asleep in class the next day during his teacher's lesson.

According to Yano, Long, and Ross (1994) the elaborated version has the advantage of reinforcing the meaning of certain words that might be omitted from a lexically simplified version; not only are the words *support* and *asleep* retained, but the word *earn* is included. In other words, the clear elaboration helps to support the processes of context recognition and context inference described by Coady, Carrell, and Nation (1985). Secondly, the elaborated version calls on the student-readers to process larger chunks of text, thus gradually improving their ability to do so. Their results showed that, like simplification, the elaborated structures were more easily read than the original versions. However, they also acknowledged that students experienced some greater difficulty reading the longer elaborated versions than the shorter simplified ones within the same time limits.

Tweissi's (1998) results also support the general findings that simplification improves the readability of baseline materials but that more is not always better. In that study, materials that were only lexically simplified were more easily read and understood than materials which were both lexically and syntactically simplified. This creates a dilemma for the teacher-author. We have thorough and exhaustive studies on the one hand that indicate that student readers require short sentences with easy words to develop their decoding skills, and newer studies which indicate that student readers need some elaboration to develop their comprehension or interpretive skills. Until a conclusive answer is found, I would advise a compromise approach mediated more by sense than by strict method:

My compromise version

Paco had to work at night to earn money to support his family. This made him tired during the day, so he often fell asleep in class.

In this case, the elaboration is supported between sentences by transitional phrasing and the comprehension of each sentence is less constrained by the limits of working (short-term) memory. The objective measures of readability for these sentences also compares favorably.

1. Baseline version: Flesch-Kincaid 7.6
2. Simplified version: Flesch-Kincaid 2.4

3. Elaborated version: Flesch-Kincaid 11.1
4. Compromise version: Flesch-Kincaid 4.9

While I agree with Yano, Long, and Ross (1994) that students need practice processing larger (and more profound, I might add) units of meaning, I feel that it is more important for them to do this between sentences, among paragraphs, and within essays rather than merely at the sentence level. I believe this calls for clear rhetoric and transitional phrasing. Let me refer again to Carrell (1984) and Carrell, Pharis, and Liberto (1989) who find that clear, concise rhetoric supports comprehension, that student readers who consciously recognize rhetorical structure understand better, and that students can be trained to recognize rhetorical structure when instructed with appropriate reading material.

Pay Attention to Appearance and Layout

In this part, we consider aspects of a reading beyond the main prose of the text. It is easy, and perhaps common, for teacher-authors to disregard the effect of superficial aspects of their writing, such as the font used, the spacing, the advisability of subject headings and subheadings, and the desirability, clarity, and placement of graphics. The usefulness of supplementary statements (either at the beginning or the end) and sometimes even the issue of the clarity of titles is often overlooked as well.

If students understand the title of a piece of writing they can often predict a fair amount of information in the text, and information expected is easier to comprehend than information which is not. I have found headings and subheadings to make a big difference for students, too. These help student-readers to recognize the boundaries of topics and create a map in their minds of the reading; it also helps them relocate certain information in review activities. Bulleted or numbered lists also aid clarity. In the paragraphs above I have provided examples of instances where bulleting or numbering three or four items provided more clarity than merely incorporating them into the linear form of a paragraph. It is useful to outline parts of the structure of essays in this way before detailing them in paragraph form. Separate summaries at the end, or perhaps better yet, overview comments at the beginning, are also very useful. Consider for example, "Here is a story about a fox and a bear. It explains why bears have such short tails." Immediately a framework can be established over the reading.

Hopefully, when we discuss the appearance of a reading, images of pictures, graphs, and charts leap to mind. Illustrations and graphics are especially useful in supporting understanding and establishing frameworks of expectation. One obvious example is the use of maps when describing a matter which has geographic dimensions. It is easy to overestimate the geographic knowledge of students, especially when place names in English and the native language are not identical. Additionally, the effect of including a relevant map at the beginning of a reading is much like that of providing an overview; it creates a context for the information students will read. Pie charts, bar graphs, schematic models, and pictures are additional sources of information which can support the comprehension of written text.

Lastly, in regards to appearance, we should discuss font. Type face can be categorized as serif as opposed to sans-serif and monospaced as opposed to

proportionally spaced. There are other considerations as well, including font weight (how bold the font is) or its size. Consider the following samples:

`courier`	Courier is a monospace, serif font. All letters are given equal space, and letters have "tails," or serifs.
helvetica	Helvetica is a proportionally spaced, non-serif font. Letters are accorded space according to their size and they are less "stylized" in the sense that they do not have serifs.
New York	New York is a proportionally spaced, serif font.

While some colleagues argue that serif fonts aid rapid word identification for native speakers, but sans-serif fonts are better for non-native speakers, my own informal research shows no clear preference regarding this among Miyazaki International College students. When asked to choose from six choices the easiest and most difficult fonts to read, twenty-six students chose serif and sans-serif fonts as equally easy to read. Regarding spacing, there was a clear preference for proportional spacing. Size and weight had some influence, but were less popular in their extremes. Overall, New York and Helvetica were greatly favored over the others, placement on the page seeming to determine the relative popularity of the two. Better than 65% (17) of the responses indicated one of these two fonts as easiest. Third runner up was Chicago, a proportional, heavily weighted font with 23% (6) of the votes for easiest to read. Least popular was clearly Poster, accounting for 24 of 28 negative responses, probably because its combination of heavy weight and serifs tended to obscure, rather than accentuate, the shapes of the words. It seems that there is little difference between native speakers and non-native speakers in terms of font preference; these students preferred fonts which accorded with my native speaker's instincts for clarity and ease of identification.

Lastly, white space is very useful. Double-spaced type helps students isolate the shapes of words for their quick identification. Additional space between paragraphs helps to reinforce the outlines and divisions of ideas. Preventing text from crowding pictures helps to emphasize their presence and the likelihood that they will be attended to. In conclusion, write with attention to producing a crisp and clean visual product with plenty of visual support. This will engender interest and facilitate the processes of recognition which support the reading process.

Write "Authentically"

When one considers all the myriad transformations which should be done to the typical baseline text to adapt it for student use—changing hard words for easy words, shortening sentences and overall length, rearranging text to clarify the rhetorical structure, manipulating the flow of ideas with the support of transitional phrasing, clarifying titles, creating clear topic headings and sub-headings, removing items from paragraph form in order to list them, and selecting the clearest font—the question "Why bother?" naturally arises. Indeed, at the end of such a laborious process, it is very unlikely that a rewrite would look much at all like the original. This is exactly the point of my last suggestion: It is better to rewrite the material than to "overwrite" it. By this I mean, write in your own words with the students (not professional peers) in mind as the audience.

In this sense, the finished version for students has the look and feel of a new original. Adapting material obligates teacher-authors to credit the sources of original ideas and data, but should not constrain them to follow the order, flow, and sequence of the original ideas and data. Originals written for native speakers typically include a lot more collateral information than is needed to comprehend the main theses; extra information requires extra processing which for non-proficient readers can be debilitating. That is why publishers of learner literature attempt to "control information" (Hedge, 1985, pp. 14-15) by limiting the number of characters or events in a story. These probably confuse more than entertain most student readers. One of the important roles of the teacher-author should be to distill information into its most concise form.

When writing in their own words, teacher-authors should be careful to avoid what Williams and Dallas (1984, p. 207) refer to as "imported text." This means that writers, having become very familiar with a source text, accidentally repeat the original wording, which of course is originally written in a different register and with a different audience in mind. Imported text, according to Williams and Dallas, accounted for a substantial amount of the reading difficulty encountered in English language social science content material for non-native speakers in Hong Kong. Perhaps the more "authentic" the reading is the better, meaning the more it is written in the personal words of the teacher with the students in mind. The final product might look as different from the source material as sample 4 of Appendix 1 looks from sample 1.

Conclusion

To summarize my views, teacher-authors seem the most able people to make substantial differences in the reading abilities, volumes, and attitudes of students. Knowing a few strategies for adapting materials will come in very handy. The suggestions I have offered should go a long way in making material accessible and teaching students to read better. However, teachers should not feel constrained to be mere simplification editors who micromanage the selection of each word and the length of each sentence. Instead, they should attempt to distill the basic ideas into a clear rhetoric organization and in simple, yet evocative, language. The resulting paraphrase-summaries might or might not essentially mirror source texts, depending upon the purposes of the teacher-author and the suitability of the sources to that. The teacher-author may move completely away from the sources and create syntheses of multiple source materials. After reviewing their writing with an eye to adding effective transitional phrasing, teacher-authors can help guarantee success with the inclusion of supportive formatting, headings, and graphics.

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1. Baseline (no adjustment)

The territorial dispute between Japan and the Soviet Union over the four islands, that is, the Habomais, Shikotan, Kunashiri, and Etorofu, that lie off the northeastern tip of Hokkaido has been one of the principal stumbling blocks in the relations between the two countries since the end of World War II. To gain some perspective on what is likely to be the future of Japanese-Soviet relations, it is necessary to review the evolution of this dispute in some depth, to assess the prospects for some eventual compromise, and to discuss the constraints on Japanese-Soviet relations in the absence of any compromise.

Flesch-Kincaid 24.5

2. Vocabulary Adjustment

The border disagreement between Japan and Russia over the four islands, that is, the Habomais, Shikotan, Kunashiri, and Etorofu, that lie off the northeastern tip of Hokkaido has been one of the main problems in the relations between the two countries since the end of World War II. To understand what is likely to be the future of Japanese-Russian relations, it is necessary to study the way this disagreement developed carefully to judge the chance for some agreement someday, and to discuss the limits on Japanese-Russian relations if there is no agreement.

Flesch-Kincaid 22.9

3. Grammar & Vocabulary Adjustment

Japan and Russia have had a border disagreement since the end of World War II. The topic is four islands: Habomais, Shikotan, Kunashiri, and Etorofu. They lie off the northeastern tip of Hokkaido. We should study how the border disagreement developed carefully. That way we can understand what is likely to be the future of Japanese-Russian relations. We can judge the chance for some agreement someday. We can discuss the limits on Japanese-Russian relations if there is no agreement.

Flesch-Kincaid 8.4

4. Original Rewrite

The Northern Territories Dispute
Adapted by Sylvan Payne & Keith Lane
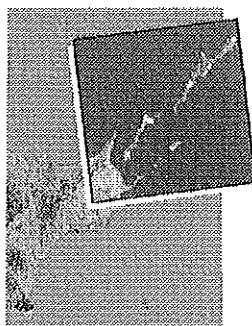
There are four islands in the ocean north of Hokkaido. The four islands are named Habomais, Shikotan, Kunashiri, and Etorofu. Japan and Russia have been arguing about these islands for many years. The Russians believe the islands belong to them. Japan believes it owns the islands. Right now Russia has them and Japan wants the islands returned. This argument has been causing problems since the end of World War II. It is a "stumbling block" to future agreements between the two countries. Why is this such a difficult issue?

During World War II, the western allies (USA, Great Britain, France, and other countries) said they were not trying to gain more territory. Russia (also known as the Soviet Union) was on the side of the allies. After the war, the allies gave back the land they occupied during the war. Only Russia has not given back the territory it took. Russia traditionally believes that all land is vital to security. Small islands like these four are used as a barrier. They protect the rest of the Soviet Union. Defense is very important to the Soviet Union.

Japan is very different. Japan does not believe national defense is such an important issue. Japan's Self-Defense Forces are fairly small and not very active. Japan does not want to make them any bigger or stronger. So these Northern Territories do not have the same value for Japan. Japan wants the islands back, but for historical and political reasons.

<div align="right">Flesch-Kincaid 6.7</div>