Needs of an ESP Context: "Needs Analysis, Curriculum & Unit Design"

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Abstract: Needs analysis is a useful tool to understand students' needs and to help the implementation of educational policies (Munby 1978, R. Richterich & J-L. Chancerel 1980, Van Els et. al. 1984). Hence, this research is intending to probe the following research questions: 1) What are the learning styles of students who covered ENGL 191 and ENGL 192 at Faculty of Communication? 2) What are the needs of those students according to the learning styles?3) How can learning efficiency be improved through designing a curriculum for an ESP context? 4) Based on the designed curriculum how was a sample unit developed? This research intends to give some helpful hints and suggestion to those who are involved with material development.

Keywords: Needs analysis; Curriculum; Unit Design; ESP Context

1. Introduction

English for academic purposes (EAP)/English for special purposes (ESP) curriculum development is guided by learner needs, defined by Johns and Dudley-Evans (1991) as the "identifiable elements" of "students' target English situations" (p. 299). The research on learner needs, known as needs analysis or needs assessment, involves surveying students about their backgrounds and goals (Frodesen, 1995; Tarone, 1989); consulting faculty about course requirements (Johns, 1981); collecting and classifying assignments (Braine, 1995; Horowitz, 1986); observing students in naturalistic settings, such as lecture classes, and noting the linguistic and behavioral demands (McKenna, 1987); or combining these techniques to obtain a description of assignments, discourse, and classroom behavior (Prior, 1995; Ramani, Chacko, Singh, & Glendinning, 1988). The rationale for needs analysis is that by identifying elements of students' target English situations and using them as the basis of EAP/ ESP instruction, teachers will be able to provide students with the specific language they need to succeed in their courses and future careers (Johns, 1991).

Needs analysis is a useful tool to understand students' needs and to help the implementation of educational policies (Munby 1978, R. Richterich & J-L. Chancerel 1980, Van Els et. al. 1984). In recent years, language teaching has become more and more learner-centered, that means "[E]verything starts from him and everything goes back to him. It is not merely in relation to him, but with him, and depending on his resources (time, available cash, personality, etc.) that his learning objectives will be defined, that the methods of judging when and how they have been attained will be selected, and that a curriculum of learning (by curriculum we understand all the means employed to attain the objectives: teacher, teaching materials, technical aids, methods, timetable etc.) will be made available to him." (R. Richterich & J-L. Chancerel 1980: P.4-5) Based on this conception, learners' needs need to be analyzed and based on consideration of these needs, learning objectives can be selected and precisely defined, so that administrators of the language institutions and teachers can use the result as a basis to construct or modify existing systems in order to suit the learners the best.

2. Needs Analysis

There is a long history of analyzing student's needs in ESL, EFL field (R. Richterich & J-L. Chancerel 1980, Buckingham 1981, Van Els et al. 1984). All the studies show that needs analysis plays an important role in second language or foreign language teaching. Richterich & Chancerel (1980) suggest that learners were at the center of the teaching system.

It is important to seek a compromise between the learners' resources available, objectives, & curricula thought and the resources, objectives, methods of assessment and curricula of the teaching units/institution and the society. As a result needs analysis can help the learners to awaken their awareness of what they need, the teacher to adapt his teaching accordingly, the producer of the teaching materials to develop their material to suit learners' needs, and the administrator and teaching executives to plan and adapt learning systems.

Needs analysis can be done before the course, during the course or with a combination of both. Needs analysis which is done before the course starts, foster knowledge

of the learners' resources, objectives, and curricula, which they consider suitable. It can also be undertaken during the course, in order to ascertain whether learners' resources are in line with the course they are following, whether the objectives can be attained and whether the methods of assessment used appropriate to judge the learner progress. The present research is done during the course in order to serve the latter purposes.

In Hong Kong, Li & Richards (1995) have done a study of Cantonese learners' needs and have evaluated Cantonese course books available. They used a questionnaire survey method by sending out 400 questionnaires and mailed to non-native speakers of Cantonese who were staff in two Hong Kong tertiary institutions and some expatriates working in the business sector. At the end of the survey 183 questionnaires were returned; a response rate of about 45%. There are three major groups of expatriates in Hong Kong with different attitude towards learning Cantonese. The first group makes no attempt to learn Cantonese. They think that Cantonese is useful but difficult to learn, and not essential because they can get along fine without it. The second group focuses on Putonghua rather than Cantonese. They view learning Putonghua is more prestigious and useful. The third group (with a significant number) do make effort to learn Cantonese but with a varying degrees of success.

The present research focuses on the third group, since our institution involves more than half of the Cantonese learning population in Hong Kong. It is more in-depth to look at the needs of the learners learning the language at present. The present research also has an instrumental purpose, which is to identify learners' needs in order to develop appropriate teaching materials, teaching method, and to match the available resources of our institution with the learners' expectations. The questionnaire used in the present research will adapt the one used in Li & Richards (1995) with some modifications in order to suit the situation of the institution.

3. Rationale of Needs Analysis

One main purpose of conducting a needs analysis is, according to Gardner and Winslow (1983:76), "to produce information which when acted upon makes courses better adapted to students' needs" and "part of the object of formal needs identification is to back up one's proposals with quantitative evidence of their importance". Furthermore, they added, "in many cases, concrete evidence of particular needs, such as these surveys produced, could be directly used as part of the course validation / approval procedure." However, as Coffey (198553) pointed out, "the whole process (of needs analysis) is so complicated that in most circumstances, there is never time to put it into practice." Lack of time was also a major reason given by the Polytechnic staff whom Gardner and Winslow (1983) surveyed, for not setting up and implementing needs identification procedures. Even though the lack of time often makes it impossible to conduct a needs analysis before designing a course syllabus or putting it forth for validation, an

existing, already validated course /syllabus can also benefit from a formal needs analysis as it ought to produce information to give feedback on the course design so that revision and improvement can be made. Thus Janice Yalden (1983:97) observed, in many cases, "it is more a question of having to modify an existing program rather than building up a whole operation from the beginning."

The research is intending to probe the following research questions:

What are the learning styles of students who covered ENGL 191 and ENGL 192 at Faculty of Communication?

What are the needs of those students according to the learning styles?

How can learning efficiency be improved through designing a curriculum for an ESP context?

Based on the designed curriculum how was a sample unit developed?

4. The study

4.1 Subjects

The aim of this study is to see the needs of the specific seven students who are complaining about the challenges they face especially in writing and speaking skills because of their limited knowledge in English. All seven participants are from the department of Radio, TV and Film Studies in Communication Faculty. Also, they are second and third year students and they are all from Turkey. Their age range is between 21-25 years old, and the proficiency level of all seven participants is known as intermediate, however they are not able to use the aspects of English as good as they were expected

4.2 Instruments and Procedure

First of all, we decided to find out learning styles and strengths of the participants by using a learning styles inventory. If we need to talk more about the instrument, Nunan (2008) suggested in his book that the starting point can be an analysis of the language, information about the learners, beliefs about the learning process itself, or a combination of these, that's why, "Memletics Learning Styles Inventory" received from a website www.memletics.com were used to see participants' beliefs about learning process, information about them, and so on (See Appendix). Another reason for choosing this inventory is the fact that this is one of the most preferred inventories and it is considered as reliable. The inventory consists of 70 statements ranging 0-2 to by circling one of the numbers. What is important here is to response according to the first thing that comes into participants mind when the statements are read. The scale of the inventory is as follows:

The description sounds nothing like you.

The description sounds partly like you.

The description sounds exactly like you.

Another part of the project is the objectives; ESP is essentially a training operation which seeks to provide learners with a restricted competence to enable them to cope with certain, clearly defined tasks, (Widdowson 1983: b). For this reason, we aimed to diagnose learners' learning styles as we have done above and then to diagnose the needs of the students. We adapted a need analysis questionnaire because of the reasons we have mentioned above. The participants' responses to the needs analysis questionnaire was like a foundation for use to design our unit and curriculum according to the stated needs of students.

On the other hand, we all know that an important step in the development of a language program is identifying learning goals. These will provide a rationale for the course of program. Learning goals may be derived from a number of sources, including task analysis, learner data, ministry of education specifications, the length of the courses, and many other factors will determine what is feasible and appropriate to set as goals, and will also largely dictate the types of communicative and pedagogic objectives which are both appropriate and feasible for the educational system in question, (Nunan, 2008). That's why, the main aim of the project is to design a completed sample unit and a draft of the whole curriculum for those specific students who stated that their basic needs are actually writing and speaking after gathering necessary information about them, and their learning styles by using the inventory and questionnaire. Also, the curriculum imposed on the students and therefore they have no chance to involve themselves into that process, but sometimes teachers may have chance to change some parts of the given syllabus. They may add or exclude new things into it in order to make students more active in relation to their needs and learning styles.

Besides, the participants also supported that situation stated above. For their English courses –ENGL 191 first semester & ENGL 192 second semester- that they took during their first year, they all said that the curriculum was provided by the institute, teacher sometimes added new topic and from time to time the teacher, especially for homework, took their opinions into attention.

For the quality of our needs assessment instrument, which is prepared as a kind of mixture of different sources, we can say that the layout has simple and clear language for students to understand. They had no difficulty to answer the needs assessments instrument. Also, since it was adapted according to the students' subject area, it was appropriate for the students. On the other hand, for Memletics Learning Styles Inventory, we used semi-structured session because students had difficulty to understand some part of the sections because of their proficiency level of English; therefore we had to translate those statements into Turkish to get more realistic results. Also, layout was not complicated it was well designed on the paper and it is easy to follow what to do in the questionnaire.

5. Results and Discussion

In recent years, there is a great significant movement in language syllabus design which suggests the use of information from learners and information about learners in curriculum decision making. For this reason, it is important to make needs analysis survey after knowing as much as possible about the learning situation of the students. Nunan (2008) stated that techniques and procedures for collecting information to be used in syllabus design are referred to as needs analysis.

ESP has two fundamental elements: the sense of having purpose and the sense of vocation. These are the basic factors which cause ESP to have growing importance. Also, there are numerous factors behind the increasing importance of ESP such as having more practical and application-oriented education, and globalization and choosing English as the language of international communication. Another factor is teaching General English to the learners at earlier ages. Having already covered the traditional General English earlier, there is no need to repeat the same aspects of English in higher levels as long as students do not need it.

The diverse range of subjects or any other varieties can make generalization difficult in ESP; however there are consistencies that ESP teachers should always consider like characteristics of the ESP learners. For instance, ESP learners have an aim like achieving something specific beyond learning the language itself. They generally need practical skills in language learning. One of the most important characteristics of ESP learners is, most probably they will be studying English at the same time as studying their subject or doing full-time job. And, our participants are learning English at the same time studying their subject area which is 'communication'.

Nunan (2009) suggested that an important step in the development of a language program is identifying learning goals. The goals can be about cognitive and affective aspects of the learners' development, what the teacher wants to achieve in the classroom, what the teacher hopes the learners will achieve in the classroom and the like. But, we should keep in mind that the needs and the goals of both teachers and learners may differ. We should clearly define information about the goals, objectives and learning activities, so that students may have greater acceptance of the learning experience that they are about to undertake.

According to references given above, we made the analysis of our results and also the implications for course design.

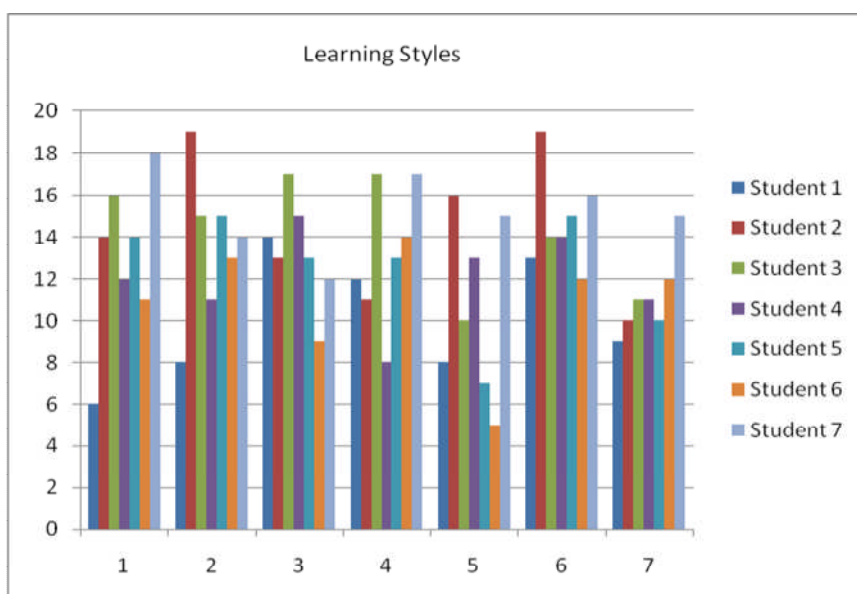The graphics of the results were illustrated below.

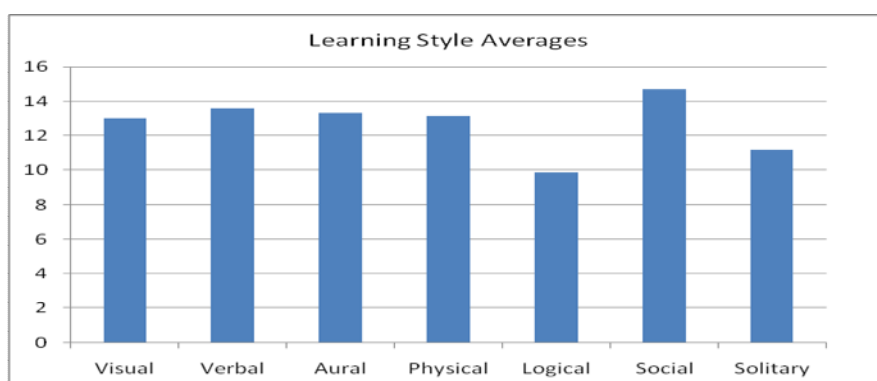Figure 1: Learning styles of participants.

Figure 2: Participants average scores in each learning style.

As it can be seen on the graphs, each individual's the first two or three highest scores are the same, but the rankings of the highest score categories are different. For instance, the highest score of student 2 is 'social' and the second highest score is 'verbal' according to the memlectic learning styles questionnaire. On the other hand, students 4's results showed that his second highest score is 'social' learning style which is student 2's first highest score. Generally, this is the same for all participants.

Our intention was to see the learners' attitudes toward language learning with the learning style inventory. And, after giving the needs analysis questionnaire, we will be considering to relate those results in course designing process, so that students learning styles and strength will also be included to achieve successful learning. Because, considering learning styles and strengths of the students are as important as considering their needs.

When it comes to the needs analysis questionnaire, the results of the participants' responses will be given in below. Only common needs of the students were presented.

Needs Analysis Questionnaire

Nationality:	*Turkish*	*Age group:*	*21-25*
Occupation:	*Students*	*Sex:*	*Male*

Which Communication English topics would you like to study?

Advertising	Interviewing
English for mass media	Setting goals
Ethics	Describing process
Telephone English	Making suggestions
Meeting	Summarizing
Presentations	Obtaining information

Which Communication English skills would you like to improve?

Writing

Giving written information

Writing/ sending responses to enquiries (e.g. exam questions)

Taking notes on talks

Reading

I need to read in detail and understand the whole text.

I need to read to find out particular piece of information. I need to read and write a similar text.

I need to read and then explain the content to a colleague or to the listeners/audience.

I need to read and then translate into my own language

I need to read aloud at meetings and presentations.

Reading scientific journals

Text analysis

Listening

Understanding the people from non-English and English speaking countries (Understanding   different accents

Listening to natural speech

Listening for the main idea/key points

Listening to radio, TV, and internet broadcast

Functions

 Emails

Speaking

Public speaking

Dealing with communication problems

Giving oral information

 Dialogue

Introducing yourself

Giving information

Giving instructions

Giving advice

Explaining rules

Explaining process or procedure

Inviting someone to do something

Congratulating

Apologizing

Materials

Compute

Journal

Books

TV

If you would like more English language aspects to be considered in the course, please feel free to note down your other needs which are missing in the questionnaire. In this section, participants noted that their basic needs are writing and speaking skills. In their profession and in their education they need to have creative writing skills since it is basic necessity of their profession. They also need writing for their education, because they need to respond successfully in their written assignments and exams in particular.

When it comes to speaking skills, they need to prepare presentations and perform some oral actions for other purposes. That's why they need speaking skills for fluent speech, and pronunciation sessions for pronouncing the vocabulary items accurately. For their profession, they need to speak clearly, fluently, accurately, and with appropriate language.

As it is suggested, before starting out to design the course, we should decide about the learning situation. For this reason, we answered these questions of Harding (2007) to decide about the frame of the course.

Learning Situation of Learners

Is it an intensive course (concentrated into one period of time) or an extensive course (spread out over a longer period of time)?

Is it assessed or non-assessed?

Is it meeting immediate needs (learners are working and studying in parallel) or delayed needs (students are pre-experienced and will be working on the specialism sometime in the future)?

Is the group homogenous or heterogeneous? For example, are they all the same level of English? Do they all have the same level of knowledge of, and involvement in, the specialism?

Is the course designed by the teacher or the institution or negotiated with the learner?

Our course is going to be 15-week course in the fall semester of an academic year. There will be three hours in each week. And it will be an assessed course. Students

will be given assignment and mini projects to fulfill according to the requirements of the course. Apart from meeting immediate needs and moving parallel with other courses to help students to cope with obstacle in general, the delayed needs such as helping students to gain experience with the projects related to their field and specialism will also be considered. The proficiency level and the subject area knowledge of the students are all the same.

While designing the course, there is no need to blindly follow a grammar syllabus, because students have a certain proficiency level of English. As we discussed by saying that there is no need to repeat the same aspects of the English. What we should do is to include practical skills in our courses by combining them with the specific needs of the students. It is needed to include contexts, texts, and situations from the students' subject areas. In this way, students will involve in the language and their subject area at the same time. Another point is, we are just language teachers, and for this reason, we should first understand the nature of our students' subject area and even we should learn enough about their area. Students' basic needs are writing and speaking but in order to model the language some of listening and reading tasks will be included in some cases. These skills can be the part of our main tasks as well. Also, they may break the monotonous of the classes. Authentic language use and materials will also be considered.

It is also necessary to talk about the objectives of the course. The objectives are listed below.

By the end of the course, students will be able;

To develop the skills (writing and speaking in particular) necessary to take part in academic study and in profession.

To develop sufficient oral and written skills.

To foster the development of critical thinking skills and the development of learning skills so that students can continue their education beyond the school setting.

To participate more actively and efficiently in English in the international arena.

To develop their level of intellect, personal improvement, and vocational knowledge.

To provide information to others in written forms (responses in exams are included).

To develop their confidence in communicating by setting regular speaking tasks.

To develop insights into English as a linguistic system.

To improve their writing skills for further practices by working on specific subskills such as paragraphing, punctuation, and linkers.

The following table is the course design.

	Topic	Writing	Speaking	Reading	Listening	Functions
Week 1	Getting started	Writing a paragraph about the media texts which they use in their daily lives.

Who was the media text produced for- who is the audience? Note-taking for the answers to be discussed) | Can you explain the reasons why you mostly use a certain type of media texts?

Who was the media text produced for- who is the audience? (Discussions of the questions) | Different Forms of Media Texts and Decoding.

Who was the media text produced for- who is the audience? (Analysis of the media texts to define the audience) | --- | Introducing yourself |
| Week 2 | The code of still graphic images | Analysis of the graphic images | Telling short story by looking at the given picture. | Text about the code of graphic images to learn technical terms. | --- | --- |
| Week 3 | Shape and proportion

Color, Texture, | Comparisons of the graphic images. | Expressing what is happening in the given | Text about color, texture, and lighting | --- | --- |

	and Lighting		graphic images.			
Week 4	Viewpoint	Task for viewpoint: Write two captions for the given two pictures	Presentation of the assignment	Viewpoint: Presentation of the technical terms in texts.	---	Giving information

Explaining process and procedure |
| **Week 5** | Ethics | Completing a story. (creative writing) | Discussion related to the ethics in different cultures. | Text about ethics | Listening to the beginning of the story and the writing a conclusion for it. | --- |
| **Week 6** | Task Zone: Deconstruction Tasks | Denotation Connotation Summary.

Analysis the images according to the TAPE rules. | Mini presentation of the analysis. | Two-step reading and summing up: Denotation and Connotation. | --- | Explaining rules |
| **Week 7** | Construction Task

Advertising: Influencing the audience | Writing slogans for the adverts. | Presentation: Making a collection from newspapers and magazines of images to illustrate all the graphic signs you have learned about in the unit. | Checklist of graphic signs | Advertising: Influencing the audience | --- |
Week 8	Marketing Concepts	Comprehension Questions	Marketing the randomly chosen product.	What is marketing?	---	---
Week 9	Equipment in mass media	---	Students are expected to introduce a new technology in the classroom.	Text about the types of equipments	---	Describing a piece of equipment (for instance, microphone, camera and so on)
Week 10	Products	Comprehension questions activities	Given 4 products, discuss market strategies to sell those products.	Matching products and markets	---	---
Week 11	A solicited letter from a graduating	Writing a similar letter given in the	---	Analyzing the writing	---	---

	senior	sample		sequence and the format of the letter		
Week 12	Scenario writing	Given scrambled images, students put them in order as they wish and write a scenario accordingly.	Audience are expected to question the scenario in terms of theory like the degree of matching the images and scenario	---	Listening to native speaking commercials to model authentic language.	Describing the way of thinking
Week 13	Watching film	Taking detailed notes during the film with critical eye	Discussion on the film. This will also help them for their short film project	---	---	Making suggestions according to the weaknesses of the film.
Week 14	Presentation of the Short-film project.					
Week 15	Presentation of the Short-film project.					

Assignments:

Presentation in week 4: The code of still graphic images project.

Students are expected to find a still graphic image and make the analysis of it. They are also expected to present it in the classroom. The audience should participate by asking questions.

Presentation in week 7: Individual project or group display.

Students are expected to make a collection from newspapers and magazines of images to illustrate all the graphic signs they have learned about in the unit.

Final Project in week 14-15: Short-film project. (Groups of 4)

The project can be in any format of the TV programs (e.g. movies, commercials, series, cartoons and the like). The duration of the film shouldn't extend 15 minutes.

6. Pedagogical Implications

An important question arises regarding the process of designing curriculum on the basis of needs analysis. If at work they use primarily passive skills such as reading, which the graduates perceived as their best skills among the four, is it necessary to concentrate on those skills? Does that kind of concentration overemphasize the written word, thereby leaving less time for the aural /oral skills which are already perceived as weaker than the other two? Finally, if the respondents' perceived needs and the actual use of the language skills are to be taken into account in revising the curriculum/syllabus, and if the two are as conflicting as they appear to be in this survey, with the graduates requesting more emphasis on social skills and the actual use concentrating on reading and writing, how can the curriculum designer reconcile these conflicting demands? Should the conclusion be as straightforward as Schutz and Derwing (1981:43) suggested: that there is "a clear injunction to maintain a place for the spoken language"?

These are typical of the questions that surface from a needs survey which can put the course designer or syllabus writer in a dilemma. Because of the clash between the learners' perceived needs and actual uses, and the course designer's own estimation of the learner's needs and their actual ones, a clear direction for the course designer does not obviously emerge. Unfortunately, even when they are identified, the "identified needs" will not be acted upon and the needs analysis will become, as Hawkey (1980:79) feared, "an end in itself, without much long term influence on the teaching / learning process."

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Appendix

A: Needs Analysis Questionnaire

B: Memlectics Learning Sytles

C: Sample Designed Unit

Needs Analysis Questionnaire

Please take time to complete this form. It will help us to customize and design your course and to meet your specific needs.

Name: _____

Nationality: _____

Occupation: _____

Age group: _____

Sex: _____

Which Communication English **topics** would you like to study?

☐ Advertising

☐ English for mass media

☐ Ethics

☐ Telephone English

☐ Meetings

☐ Presentations

☐ Interviewing

☐ Decision-making

☐ Setting goals

☐ Describing process

☐ Making suggestions

☐ Introductions, small talk

☐ Asking for advice

☐ Summarizing

☐ Obtaining Information

☐ Offering praise, complaints

☐ Agreeing/disagreeing, persuading, clarifying, and interrupting

If they are not written above, add more topics of communication.

_____

_____ .

Which Communication English **skills** would you like to improve?

Reading

☐ I need to read quickly for general understanding.

☐ I need to read in detail and understand the whole text.

☐ I need to read to find out particular piece of information.

☐ I need to read and write a similar text.

☐ I need to read and then explain the content to a colleague or to the listeners/audience.

☐ I need to read and then translate into my own language

☐ I need to read aloud at meetings and presentations.

☐ Quick reading for specific information and key points

☐ Reading scientific journals

☐ Text analysis

☐ Reports

☐ Correspondence

☐ Articles, journals, and abstracts

Speaking

☐ Public speaking

☐ Describing things when you don't know the exact word

☐ Staying on a topic

☐ Persuasive questioning

☐ Dealing with communication problems

☐ Giving oral information

☐ Dialogue

Writing

☐ Giving written information

☐ Writing/sending responses to enquiries (e.g. exam questions)

☐ Reports

☐ Taking notes on talks

☐ Memos/Messages

☐ Emails

☐ Letters

☐ Cover letters and CVs

☐ Forms: applications, proposals, and invoices

Listening

☐ Understanding the people from non-English and English speaking countries (Understanding   different accents

☐ Listening to natural speech

☐ Listening for the main idea/key points

☐ Listening to radio, TV, and internet broadcast

Functions

☐ Greeting a colleague

☐ Introducing yourself

☐ Introducing a colleague

☐ Asking for information

☐ Giving information

☐ Giving instructions

☐ Giving orders

☐ Giving advice

☐ Asking for help and advice   ☐ Interrupting

☐ Explaining rules   ☐ Inviting someone to do something

☐ Explaining where something is   ☐ Making an offer

☐ Explaining process or procedure   ☐ Congratulating

☐ Making suggestion   ☐ Apologizing

☐ Putting forward a formal proposal   ☐ Dealing with a complaint

☐ Asking for clarification   ☐ Describing a piece of equipment or machinery

Materials

Computer	TV	Radio
Journals	Books	Articles

If you would like more English language aspects to be considered in the course, please feel free to note down your other needs which are missing in the questionnaire.

Sample Unit Design

Media and Forms of Media

You are about to start some detective work. You are about to crack some codes.

We are going to take a close look at the **media** and the codes used in making media messages.

The word 'media' is the plural of 'medium': a means of communication. In this course, the word 'media' especially refers to those means which are used to communicate with mass of people. These are also called **mass media**. What sort of media can you name?

Media play a huge part in our lives. They provide entertainment (through TV programs, radio and films), and information (through TV, newspapers, and the internet). But they can also attempt to influence and persuade us- to buy a particular product, to vote for a political party, or to feel a certain way about a current issue.

We use the term **media text** to refer to any message sent by the media. A media text might be as long as a feature film or as short as a five-second radio jingle.

All media texts try to influence us: newspaper articles and advertisements are obvious examples which do this. But even when we watch a film, we are influenced by what we see- to feel excitement, fear, happiness, and a whole range of other emotions.

Because of this ability to influence us, media texts are hugely powerful. Decoding them- working out how they exert that power- can be a lot of fun. But it's also useful to know how media texts work, so that we can decide for ourselves how much power we are going to let them have over us.

This course attempts to show you how.

Speaking

Different Forms of Media Text

You experience media texts in a variety of ways. You might see them on a screen, hear them on a radio or see them in a magazine.

1   With a partner, note down all the different media texts you took an interest in during the past week. For each one, write down what type of text it was, and the title- for instance:

Type of text	Title
TV news program	Seven o'clock news
Computer game	
Music CD	

See how many different forms of media text you can list.

2   Now, with your list to help you, make your own version of the chart below, putting X in the boxes to show you how much time you spend using each medium you have on your list. This will start you thinking about how much you see the mass media in a typical week.

Media	Not much time	Quite a lot of time	A lot of time
Newspapers		X	
Brochures	X		
Posters			X
Television			X
Internet		X	
Radio	X		

3   Now pick out the mass medium which you use more than any other during a week. Can you explain why you use this medium so much?
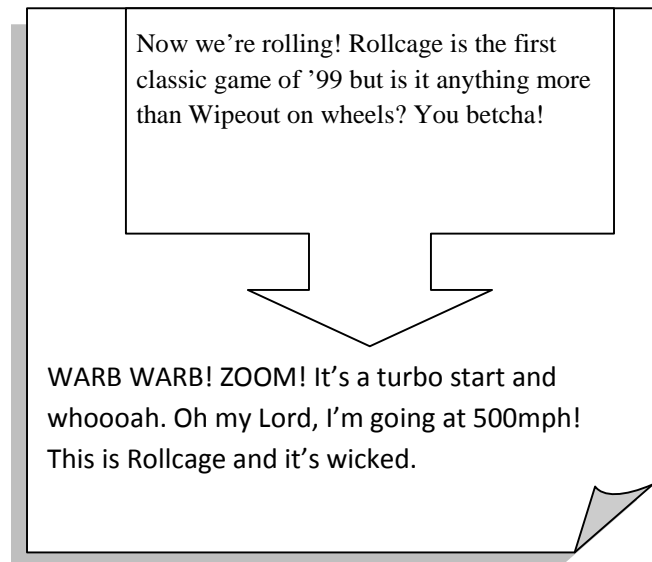
Reading

Decoding Media Texts

You have looked at the different kinds of media texts which are around us. Now you can start looking at the messages contained in these texts and how they are put together. You'll find out that you already know a lot about media texts- but you may not have thought about how and why media texts are constructed.

Signs in media texts

Media texts are made of **signs** which stand for different things, and which can be combined to have a particular effect on the reader. (Even if a media text is made up entirely of pictures, we say you **read** it.)

You will already be familiar with some signs: for example, look at this extract from a media text:

The writer of this text is trying to excite the reader- and one of the first clues to this is how many exclamation marts there are in the text. You probably picked up on the use of this sign without really noticing.

> Now we're rolling! Rollcage is the first classic game of '99 but is it anything more than Wipeout on wheels? You betcha!
>
> WARB WARB! ZOOM! It's a turbo start and whoooah. Oh my Lord, I'm going at 500mph! This is Rollcage and it's wicked.

Some signs in media texts can be quite difficult to spot and they can work in ways that is hard to explain. However, let's start with some more signs which are all around us and which can we read very easily.

For instance, all of the following signs mean 'stop':

The full stop tells you when to stop reading.

Stop sign   Traffic police hand   Red traffic light   Full stop at the end of reading.

Try to answer the following questions
1. Which flowers are used as sign of:
    A. Love?
    B. Remembering those killed in war?
2. Which colors are used as signs for:
    A. Death?
    B. Ambulance emergency warning?
    C. Traffic to 'go'?
3. Draw the graphic signs used in comics to indicate a character is:
    A. Thinking
    B. Speaking
4. Describe the audio (sound) signs which are used to represent the following:
    A. Danger
    B. The breaking rule in a football game
    C. Telephone line engaged.
5. Write down the meaning of the following signs. Have you read them in the same way as your partner?

A.   B.

The four basic media codes

The signs used in media texts fall into four basic codes. Three of them are visual (we see the signs) and one is aural (we hear them). A media text will use one or more of these codes to get its message across.

Code of sound

Music, speech, sound effects, silence

Code of written language

Words, language features, punctuation

Code of moving images

Film, animation, TV, video and computer screen images

Code of still graphic images

Images drawn, photographed, computer generated.
In the rest of this unit, we will be looking at the signs that make up these for different code, and how they combine to make media text.
But you can start decoding media text by asking some simple questions.
We will look at these questions over the next few pages.

Looking At the Type of Text

The first questions you need to ask yourself about any media text are:
1. What type of text is this?
    (It might be a news report, a review, an advert, etc.)
2. What codes does this text use?

JFK'S SON KILLED IN PLANE CRASH

     The son of murdered US President John F Kennedy is missing presumed dead in a plane crash.

     Novice pilot John Kennedy Jr was flying his private air craft when it plunged in to the Atlantic

1._____
_____
_____

BBC RADIO 1
FM 97.6 - 99.9
THE BREAKFAST

2._____
_____
_____

Looking At Audience

The next question to ask yourself is:

Who was the media text produced for- who is its audience?

The audience for a media text can be classified using these questions:

1. Are they male or female- or does the text aim to attract both sex?
2. How old are they?
3. What sort of job do they do? Do they earn a high, medium or low wage?
4. What are their interests? (e.g. do they have families? Do they travel a lot, or have particular hobbies?)

1._____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

THE HOTTEST RESORT IN SPAIN!

The "WHITE COAST" OF Benidorm Boast one of Europe's FINEST sunshine records and remains the WILDEST of all Costa Blanca's resort. The panoramic sandy beaches of LEVANTE and PONIENTE have an excellent choice of water sports. ☺

2._____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Looking At Purpose

Next, you need to decide why the media text was produced- what is its purpose? And is it trying to achieve its purpose by appealing to particular emotions?

A text could aim to:

- Express feelings (e.g. the words to a love song)
- Explain something (e.g. non-fiction book)
- Entertain (e.g. a TV sitcom)
- Persuade (e.g. an advert)
- Inform (e.g. weather forecast)

And it could try to achieve its aim by making its audience feel:

- Amused
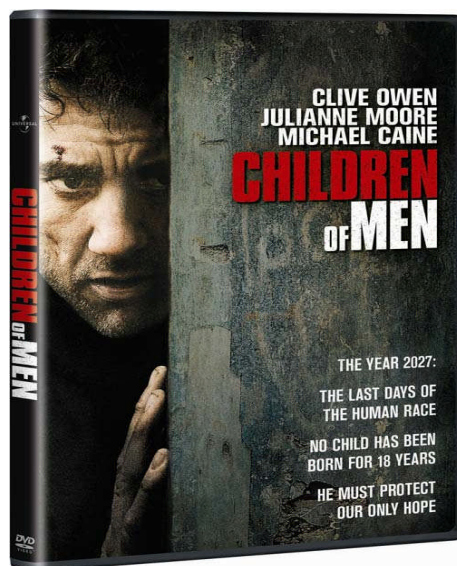- Anxious
- Envious
- Any other emotion

A radio pop music program aims to entertain people by: amusing them with jokes and char, informing them with snippets of news, and playing music to give them pleasure.

So to define the purpose of a text, ask these two questions:

1. What is this text trying to do?
2. What is it trying to make its audience think and feel, in order to do this?
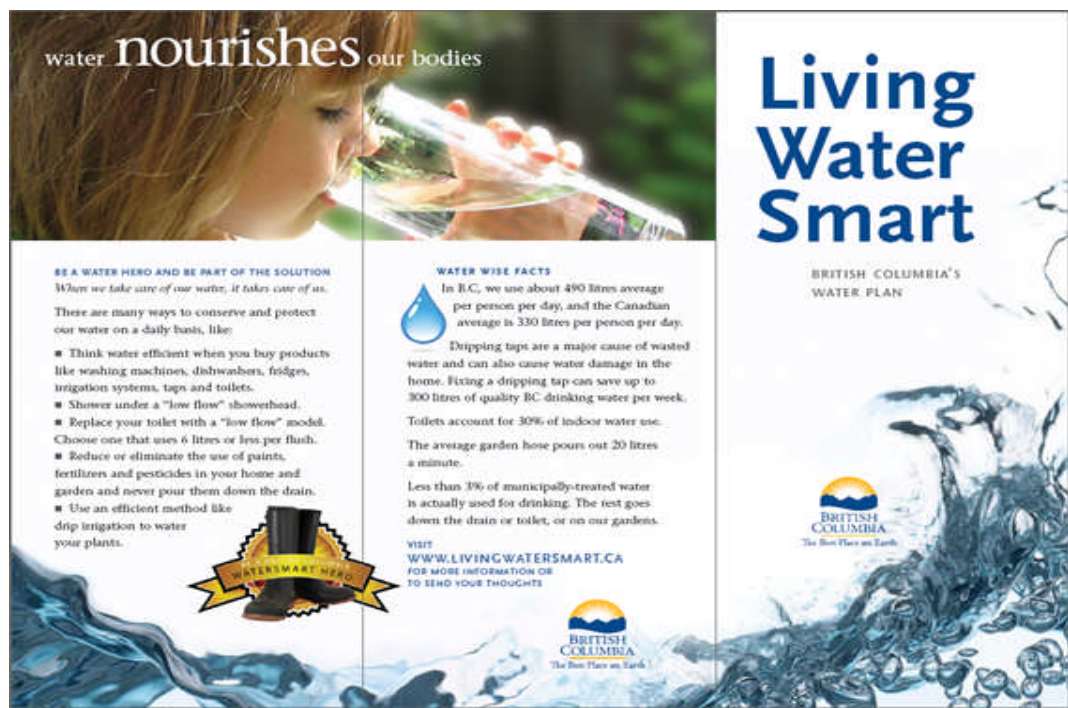
1._____
_____
_____

2._____
_____
_____

Looking At Effectiveness

Once you have thought about the type of text, its audience and what it is trying to achieve, there is another important question to ask:

Do you think it would work?

Remember, the effect of a message is often not what the sender intended. For example an expensive film may be a flop at the box office- or a record release may not sell many copies. Sometimes, you can remember that an advert was funny, but not what it was trying to sell: so it has worked in one way, but it hasn't really achieved its purpose.

To think about effectiveness, you need to 'step back' from a media text and think about what it is likely to have on its audience- whether you think it would work.

> Look back at the examples that you we have done previously. Do you think each one would achieve its purpose? If so, why? If not, why?

You've covered the main points you need to consider when looking at any media text. Here is the summary of the elements we have covered.

TAPE

Type:

What tyoe of text is this?

What codes does it use?

Audience:

Who is the audience? (Age?, Gender?, Interest?)

Purpose:

What is the text trying to do?

What is it trying to make its audience think and feel, in order to do this?

Effectiveness:

Do you think the text would achieve its purpose?