



## Creating ELT Materials Using OER Corpora

by [Brent A. Green](#) and [Veronica Wright](#)

Though textbooks provide valuable resources in the second language classroom, they come with a variety of limitations. Some learners complain about the quality of the content or topics. Some teachers feel that there is not enough coverage of particular spoken or written language structures to meet learners' needs, and the activities or tasks do not provide enough meaningful practice. Because of these limitations, teachers are often required to develop their own materials. Many, however, struggle to find copyright-free source texts which can be used to develop interesting, local, and relevant materials specific to learners' needs. In addition, teachers and textbook writers regularly rely on their own intuitions to create materials, which often do not accurately reflect actual language use patterns in real world language domains (Biber & Reppen, 2002).

## The Benefits of OER for Creating Materials

Open educational resources (OER) spoken and written materials can be readily accessed using a variety of tools. We have found that these materials, when collected in a corpus, can be used to inform language classrooms and meet a variety of English language teaching (ELT) needs. These resources help teachers make up for some of the aforementioned limitations. The advantages of such corpora are many; they are based on language used in real contexts and they give teachers the rights to

- make, own, and control copies of the content;
- use the content in a wide range of ways;
- adapt, adjust, modify, or alter the content itself;
- combine the original or revised content with other material to create something new; and
- share copies of the original content, revisions, or remixes with others (see [OpenContent.org](https://opencontent.org)).

We have created a written corpus from OER sources and have used it successfully to develop materials for our English language classes (Green, n.d.). In this article, we demonstrate how you can access and use OER written corpora to create highly effective materials for a variety of classroom teaching purposes in a variety of ESL/EFL contexts.

## Choosing the Right OER

The first step involves accessing OER materials that match your students' target language use (TLU) domain, or the area or situations in which the students will use the language in the future (Bachman & Palmer, 1996). For example, at BYU-Hawaii, we work in an academic English program with four levels of instruction. Our TLU domain is introductory level credit-bearing university courses. In preparation for using materials in our context, we searched for OER sources that match our TLU domain. The source we found is [OpenStax](#) college textbooks from the OpenStax webpage hosted by Rice University. OpenStax publishes free, openly licensed, peer-reviewed, university-level textbooks. We took the texts from these textbooks, downloaded them, and compiled them into an OER Academic English Corpus (OER-AEC) that is housed at the [OER Corpus for EAP](#) website. For those working in K–12 settings, you can most likely find OER materials which meet your specific needs at [OER Commons](#).

## Using OER Corpora

### Getting Started

In order to use the OER-AEC, we recommend organizing the files and programs by placing them in folders on your desktop for easy access. If you are going to use the corpora in a language lab, you can create the same folders for learner access as well. This will better facilitate teacher-centered, collaborative, and student-centered activities and materials development.

First, create a master folder which names your institution. We named ours *BYUH Corpora*. Within this folder, create three subfolders and title them as follows:

- **Concordancer**, where the AntConc program will be located
- **Corpora**, where the text versions of the OpenStax textbooks will be located
- **Other Programs**, where you will place other Laurence Anthony software and/or OER programs which facilitate creating and using the OER-AEC corpus (i.e., AntFileConverter and AntFileSplitter)

Next, go to the OER Corpus for EAP website and download the files and programs named in the preceding list, saving them in their respective subfolders. The OpenStax textbooks have been converted and are freely available for download at the OER Corpus for EAP website as well. To learn how to begin using AntConc to search for patterns which you will use to create ELT materials, we recommend watching [Laurence Anthony's YouTube channel](#) because there can be a slight learning curve as you begin using corpora searching tools. The videos, especially the first three, are very helpful in explaining the basics and giving you a foundation of knowledge about how these tools work. After gaining a basic overview using the videos, you should be ready to perform the simple searches you need to create materials for your classes.

## Creating Materials

Now you are ready to create materials using your OER corpus database. The first thing to do is to identify common errors that your students make. They could be particular grammatical structure(s), single vocabulary, and/or multiword expressions (Hinkel, 2019) that students struggle with and which you want them to learn and practice.

Then, choose the corpus files that match the TLU domain that you want to focus on (i.e., does the target structure occur in a particular subject area of texts, e.g., science or business?). Upload files from the target Corpus subfolder into AntConc and search for the structure of interest.

Create learning opportunities that have students interact with the corpus data that demonstrates the correct pattern of language use. You can do this by identifying example concordance lines from the files that demonstrate the correct pattern of language use. Copy these lines and put them into a worksheet. In the worksheet, provide questions that prompt students to analyze and identify patterns in the concordance lines. You may need to guide students' discoveries of the patterns at first.

As you create the worksheets and prompts, make sure to have students focus on three areas, as outlined by Larsen-Freeman (2014):

1. **Form:** The rules that dictate the structure of the item
2. **Meaning:** The lexical as well as the grammatical meaning of the structures
3. **Use:** The rules that dictate what contexts are appropriate to use the item in

This approach will help students gain a deeper and more lasting understanding of the items of interest. As students become more familiar with the process, they will begin to become more autonomous and choose their own language structures to research and learn about.

See the [Appendix \(PDF\)](#) for a quick overview, or cheat sheet, of this materials creation process.

## Examples

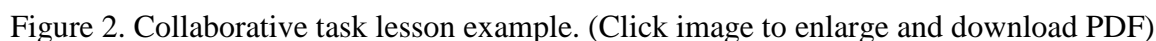
Following are examples of teacher-centered, collaborative, and student-centered materials we developed using our OER corpus, AntConc, and a word processor. Take note that using materials created from corpora involves students playing the role of linguistic detectives, meaning they must infer the patterns from the data presented.

### Teacher-Centered

In the following example (Figure 1), the teacher selects the target structure and creates a worksheet for the students. Pairs work together at first and try to inductively come up with the rules. The teacher then explains the rules at the end of the activity.



The following lesson example (Figure 2) is a dialog of a collaborative task which was carried out in one of our classrooms. As you can see, the teacher gives clues and guides the students to their own conclusions.



## Student-Centered

In the following example (Figure 3), students work on the data independently. They demonstrate that they understand the pattern by writing it in their own words, showing examples from the corpus, and finally adding their own sentences using the structure under investigation.

**Form, Meaning, and Use Handout**

As you engage in your linguistic "detective" work, take notes on the patterns you see. Try to make distinctions between the structure's form, meaning, and use.

Language structure under investigation: \_\_\_\_\_

Form (How is this structure formed?):
Write examples from the corpus which show this pattern:
Write your own sentence(s) using the correct pattern:

Meaning (What does this structure mean?):
Write examples from the corpus which show this pattern:
Write your own sentence(s) using the correct pattern:

Use (When is this structure used?):
Write examples from the corpus which show this pattern:
Write your own sentence(s) using the correct pattern:

Figure 3. Student-centered worksheet example. (Click image to enlarge and download PDF)

More examples of materials derived from OER corpus can be found at the OER Corpus for EAP website. Once you feel comfortable using the written corpus, you can expand your repertoire to include OER spoken corpora as well.

## Conclusion

We have seen the positive effects of using materials derived from the OER-AEC. They are powerful tools that can help teachers overcome limitations in materials development and help students become autonomous learners equipped with authentic tools and skills that enable them to improve their English long after they have left our classrooms. We hope that the steps and guidelines for using the OER-AEC and the example materials included in this article will open the doors for the use of the OER-AEC in your classrooms.

## References

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## **Appendix A**

### **How to Create a Teacher-Centered Worksheet for Corpus-Based Instruction**

**Step 1:** Download the necessary files and programs onto your computer from the [OER-EAP website](#) and familiarize yourself with the AntConc program.

**Step 2:** Identify a common structure that students struggle with.

**Step 3:** Open AntConc and load in your target corpus files from the OER-AEC.

**Step 4:** Search for your target expression(s), sorting the data based on the patterns you are looking for (e.g. search term(s), left, or right context).

**Step 5:** Select the data you want to copy over to your teacher-generated worksheet. Be sure to select clear patterns of the target structures.

**Step 6:** On the worksheet, ask questions that get the students to examine the data and that look for particular patterns you are hoping they will “discover” (Note: you may need to help them figure this out initially. Once they complete several questions, it becomes easier for the learners).

## ***Adjust and Its Multiple Forms in Academic Text***

**Instructions:** The word *adjust* has both noun, verb, and adjective forms and occurs quite frequently with other words in academic texts. In this task, you are going to examine example sentences with *adjust* taken from the OER-AEC and answer questions about them. What patterns do you see in the use of *adjust*? Some guiding questions have been provided to help you guess the patterns. You may work with a partner or in a small group if you wish.

### *Example Sentences*

1. It can take years to fully adjust to living in a new culture.
2. How long does it take for wages and prices to adjust, and for the economy to rebound to its potential GDP?
3. In the short run, firms cannot change the usage of fixed inputs, while in the long run, the firm can adjust all factors of production.
4. After adjusting for inflation, the federal minimum wage dropped more than 30 percent from 1967 to 2010, even though the nominal figure climbed from 1.40 to 7.25 per hour.
5. The key question is how expenditures in each category will adjust as national income rises.
6. An adjustable-rate mortgage (ARM) is a type of loan that one can use to purchase a home in which the interest rate varies with the rate of inflation.
7. When a price, wage, or interest rate is adjusted automatically with inflation, economists use the term indexed.
8. By 1980, the economy had adjusted back to 4% unemployment and the inflation rate had returned to 2%.
9. Even so, many home heating bills rose, so people adjusted their consumption in other ways, too.
10. The good news for unions and their members is that their members earn about 20% more than nonunion workers, even after adjusting for factors such as years of work experience and education level.
11. The real value is the value after adjusting for changes in inflation.
12. After adjusting to remove the effects of inflation, this represents a roughly 20-fold increase in the economy's production of goods and services.



13. The U.S. income tax is charged on the nominal interest received in dollar terms, without an adjustment for inflation.
14. With a technological improvement that brings about a reduction in costs of production, an adjustment process will take place in the market.
15. In an economy where most people have rational expectations, economic adjustments may happen very quickly.

### Questions

1. Can you find some examples of *adjust* as a verb? Write the number of the sentences where *adjust* is a verb.

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2. Can you find some examples of *adjust* as a noun? Write the number of the sentences where *adjust* is a noun.

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3. How about *adjust* as an adjective?

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4. What are the most frequent words which occur before or after *adjust* as a verb?

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5. What are the most frequent words which occur before or after *adjust* as a noun?

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6. What are the most frequent words which occur before or after *adjust* as an adjective?

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7. What else do you notice about the use of *adjust* in academic texts? Can you find some examples of *adjust* being used in the passive voice?

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## Collaborative Corpus-Based Lesson With *Success* and Its Collocations

**Teacher:** I noticed that in your last essay about being successful students that many of you were not getting the correct form of the word *success*.

Here are some examples from your papers (Teacher writes them on the board):

Here are some tips for students to be **success**

What does it take to **success** in college

This is how to be a **success** college student

Can anyone tell me what the other forms of the word “success” are?

**Student A:** successful

**Student B:** succeed

**Student C:** successfully

**Teacher:** Excellent. Okay, let’s look at some corpus data to see how all of these forms are used in academic texts. We will use the Psychology textbook since psychology focuses on **successful** learning. (The teacher brings up AntConc and searches for all forms of the word “success”)

**Teacher:** Okay, let’s look at **success**. Can you see any example like the first one in the sentence on the board?

**Students:** No.

**Teacher:** How are the examples from the corpus different from the one on the board? What patterns do you see?

**Student A:** I see that “a” or “the” come before the word.

**Teacher:** Right. Now, why is that?

(Conversation continues until students demonstrate understanding. A great follow-up activity would be to get the students to produce sentences of their own.)

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Use (When is this structure used?):
Write examples from the corpus which show this pattern:
Write your own sentence(s) using the correct pattern: