

## **The Infinite Possibilities of Scrapbooks**

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We first got the idea of using scrapbooks in English language classes when we were teaching a private student whose English was good, but who simply didn't seem to want to talk much. One day, we brought in a few photographs and immediately the atmosphere of the lesson changed as the student became interested and started asking questions about each photo. Conversation flowed naturally as the student held the photos and asked questions such as "Who is this?", "What is she doing?", "Where is this?" and so on. For the next lesson, the student brought in some photos of his family and friends, and we could continue the conversation in much the same way. Seeing how easily a normally reticent EFL student took to the photos, we decided to explore the use of scrapbooks in much more depth, and eventually began to base an entire semester of a university Oral Communication course on the idea of scrapbooks. By having students make a scrapbook page on a series of themes such as music, family, hometown, and books, and by adding supportive language activities, scrapbooks have become the focus of most of our Oral Communication classes.

Scrapbooks are not a new idea in EFL. They have been used for project-based learning (Yabuno, 2006), as a tool in poster presentations (Ward, 1994), as a means of learning and consolidating vocabulary (Rueckert, 2008), or as a way to enliven learning notebooks (Lawless, 2009). However, in this paper we have taken the idea of scrapbooks much further by placing them at the core of our courses.

Scrapbooks may seem a little old-fashioned in our modern world in which students post photos and comments on social networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace, and Mixi. Like many other teachers, we have tried using blogs and online sites to generate communication in CALL classrooms and regular classes. However, in our experience, there is nothing as effective as a real scrapbook in encouraging students to talk about their own lives and to encourage other students to ask them genuinely interested questions about it.

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Our experiences in recent years is that students have been enthusiastic and positive about learning English through scrapbooks. One recurring comment was that the students

felt that they had achieved more genuine oral communication than in any of their other classes. In future research, we plan to carry out more systematic surveys to assess student attitudes towards scrapbooks and the actual learning achieved through their use, but in the meantime we would like to share our experiences of how (and possibly why) they have been successful.

### **Why Use Scrapbooks?**

One way to conceptualize the use of scrapbooks in EFL classes is as a realization of a social constructivist model of the teaching-learning process in which teacher, learner,

learning materials, and task all mutually interact within a supportive context in order to lead to a dynamic ongoing learning process (Williams and Burden, 1997). Scrapbooks have proved to be a wonderful way for students to talk about a context and topic that they know very well – themselves.

How many times have you had artificial conversations in the classroom that weren't meaningful for either you or the students? So many textbooks feature the same tired dialogues between textbook characters that bear little relation to the lives of our students. Both the students and the teacher become bored by mid-term, repeating the same kind of exercises which often seem irrelevant. We believe that scrapbooks are inherently motivational because it is the students' own content – a prop that allows students to talk in meaningful ways about things that are relevant to them. Scrapbooks can act as a mediator between the teacher and the students, the students and their classmates, and the environment of the classroom with the outside world of the students. In this way the scrapbooks act as a powerful tool in the generation of genuine interaction at many levels.

## What Do You Need?

Making scrapbooks can be very simple. The most important ingredient is imagination, and your students will surprise you by how much they can bring to the classroom when they are talking about their own lives. We like to have students make their scrapbooks on A4 coloured paper, a little thicker than usual to ensure that it can support the items that are pasted to it and that it will last a long time. We have found that A4 is big enough to allow them to affix various items, but still small enough to fit snugly inside a textbook or a backpack.

Other useful items are of course scissors, paste, stencils, and some coloured markers. The teacher doesn't necessarily need to prepare these things in the classroom as students should be preparing their scrapbooks as homework. However, we have found it is always good to have extra resources in the classroom for students to touch up their work.

You should encourage students to choose a variety of things to stick into their scrapbooks. Some examples include maps, postcards, photos, stickers, letters, magazine clippings, guitar picks, hair clippings, illustrations, charts, food labels, and on and on – the limit is only set by your students' imaginations.

You may need to give different instructions depending on class size. For example, when doing private lessons or working with very small groups, perhaps giving more freedom is appropriate as you can deal with it in the next class. However, when implementing this concept to large classes of 30+ students, you may need to give more detailed explanations of what you expect. You can specify the content of the scrapbook as precisely if you wish. As a case in point, you could say, "Include three photographs and one sketch. Write one keyword beside each item."

While every teaching situation is unique, an example of how scrapbooks might be used with a typical large university EFL class is presented below.

## What Can You Do with Scrapbooks?

In our classes, we generally follow a two-week cycle. This is briefly outlined.

### Lesson 1

In the first week, we introduce the topic. There is a huge range of possible topics to choose from. Ones we've found useful include school, friends, hometown, music, family, food, books, travel, hobbies, dreams, sports, club activity, festivals, animals, and homes.

After specifying the topic, we introduce relevant vocabulary and encourage students to add to it through brainstorming. Next, we provide a model scrapbook page based on our lives. In our experience, students will be most motivated if you are willing to share something from your own life. You may also like to show your students the examples provided in the appendices.

Following the topic introduction, students are given a prepared interview sheet with questions based on the topic. For example, if the topic were "Family," interview questions could include "Who is the funniest person in your family?", "What does your mother do?", or "Do you have any pets?" Students are given enough room on the interview sheet to prepare at least two of their own questions. The list of questions is then used by each student to interview three or four different classmates. By asking and answering the questions, the students begin to think about the topic more deeply and to activate the vocabulary and grammar structures that they can use to talk about it. In addition, they are already preparing themselves for the actual presentation of their own scrapbook page for the next class.

This interview activity can be supported by providing useful language or additional vocabulary. The teacher can also select or create listening activities and readings that are relevant to the topic which can be used to further develop and reinforce the unit's vocabulary.

### **Homework: Making the Scrapbook Page**

At the end of the first lesson in this cycle, students are assigned homework – to make their own scrapbook page on the topic that they have been practicing and to prepare a short presentation (usually 2 minutes in our university classes) to explain it to other students. Be sure to elicit and brainstorm scrapbook ideas before sending them home. For example, if the topic is travel, some students will offer ideas such as train ticket stubs, travel brochures, maps, photographs, or a small souvenir or sticker from a previous vacation. More ideas generated and written on the board go a long way in ensuring the students will go home and put together an interesting and creative scrapbook page.

We always set a minimum limit of four or five items pasted on to the A4 scrapbook page in order to ensure that students have enough to talk about in their presentation. However, more often than not, students completely cover their page – often with some very innovative ideas. It wasn't uncommon to see some of our students producing scrapbook pages with 3D-effect pages, with parts popping right off the page. We also require students to write notes on the back of their scrapbook page to help them make their presentation, and sometimes keywords on the front of the page.

### **Lesson 2**

In the second lesson in each cycle, students are required to make a presentation about their scrapbook page. This can be carried out in small groups if you have a large number of students. Be sure to rotate the groups so that students get a chance to practice their presentation several times during a semester. After practicing in small

groups, call on as many students as possible to present in front of the whole class.

You will find that many students write out the full text of their presentation. This is not necessarily a bad thing, but over time, you should encourage them to practice making their presentations from notes or even from memory. You should also help them to make better presentations by providing useful language for starting and finishing their presentations, as well as phrases such as “Look at this picture” to help them to point out the scraps on their page. It is also a good idea to require students who are listening to ask at least one question each. This ensures that they listen and pay attention.

The scrapbook pages are also ideal for poster presentations. In larger classes of over 25 students, an A4 scrapbook might be too small for all students in class to see. In such cases, it might be possible to make a scrapbook with larger paper, but a more practical alternative is to have students put their pages on the wall around the classroom and to take turns explaining their scrapbook page to other students who rotate around the room. A high-tech alternative for some would be to use an image magnifier. Each of these options are useful ways to encourage students to speak without notes since they can no longer see their notes on the back of the page.

## Potential Problems and Avoiding Them

Of course, things may not go as smoothly as we have described, especially the first time that students make their scrapbook presentations. Appendix C shows a sample handout for students that can reduce the likelihood of many problems.

Moreover, four common problems and potential solutions are presented below in a question and answer format.

*Q: How would you handle students who bring nothing to class?*

A: We keep a grab-bag of items on hand for presentation days. Those students who are not prepared can choose four or five items from the grab bag and must create a short presentation with what they have chosen. It may not be as personal, but it does offer an opportunity for creativity and the student must still participate in class.

*Q: What do you do if another student makes fun of a classmate's scrapbook choices?*

A: In general, we have found that students are supportive and appreciative of their fellow classmates' work. Indeed, they seem to greatly enjoy the opportunity of learning about the lives of their classmates outside the classroom. In the rare case where one student might appear to be making fun of another student's work, be sure to remind students to be respectful of their classmates' work, and caution any student who is in violation of this. You may need to alter your class organization if there is clearly a problem within a specific group of students.

*Q: What should you do if a student expresses a concern about privacy?*

A: Most students are very happy to share information about their lives and are quite sensible about setting their own limits for what they are willing to share. However, if a student does express concern about privacy, for example an unwillingness to share photographs of their family, give them the option of creating their own drawings, or even focusing on a famous family in popular culture.

Q: *What do you do if a student uses an inappropriate item?*

A: Be aware that there is often a generational and cultural difference between teachers and students, so what may appear as inappropriate to you may not always be so to the students. However, if an item in a scrapbook is obviously inappropriate, for example a pornographic image or drug paraphernalia, take the student aside, and explain that the item must be removed before the presentation can continue.

## Completing the Scrapbook

At the end of the course, students should combine all of their individual scrapbook pages into a complete scrapbook. This provides an excellent sense of closure to a semester's work and provides tangible proof to the students about what they have learned. Be sure to have them design a cover with slightly thicker paper and to make it into a proper scrapbook by stapling or using some other kind of simple binding. In future English courses, on homestays, and in any future encounters with English speakers, the scrapbook can provide a wonderful and real introduction to the student's life and act as a prop that will help them to use their linguistic resources as effectively as possible.

After a final check, the scrapbook should be returned to the students to allow them to use them in the future. You may wish to keep a scrapbook or to take photographs of it in order to demonstrate good examples to students in future classes. This, however, does raise issues of privacy, and teachers should ensure that they receive written permission to show the work to future students, probably in the form of a simple statement granting rights to use it, something similar to the example below:

Student Name:

I am happy to let my teacher use copies or photos of my scrapbook for future classes, discussions with other teachers, or research papers.

Signed:

We hope that the ideas in this short paper will encourage you to bring the infinite possibilities of scrapbooks into your classroom. For teachers who are looking for additional ideas, books such as *The Encyclopedia of Scrapbooking Techniques* (McIvor and Mason, 2006) can offer many wonderful ideas. But if you are open to the creativity and ideas of your very own students, you will find that they amaze you with their presentations of their worlds through their beautiful scrapbooks.

## References

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## Appendix A – Good Examples of Scrapbook Pages

Example 1 shows a good range of the items that can be used in scrapbooks including maps, photographs, hand-drawn diagrams, music scores, handwritten text, and realia.

*Example 1.* Some “good” Japanese university EFL scrapbook samples.



Examples 2 and 3 give a closer view of the use of realia. Adding these makes the scrapbooks three-dimensional and creates a much bigger impact.

*Example 2.* A detailed image of a “good” Japanese university EFL scrapbook page.





*Example 3.* Another detailed image of a “good” Japanese university EFL scrapbook page.

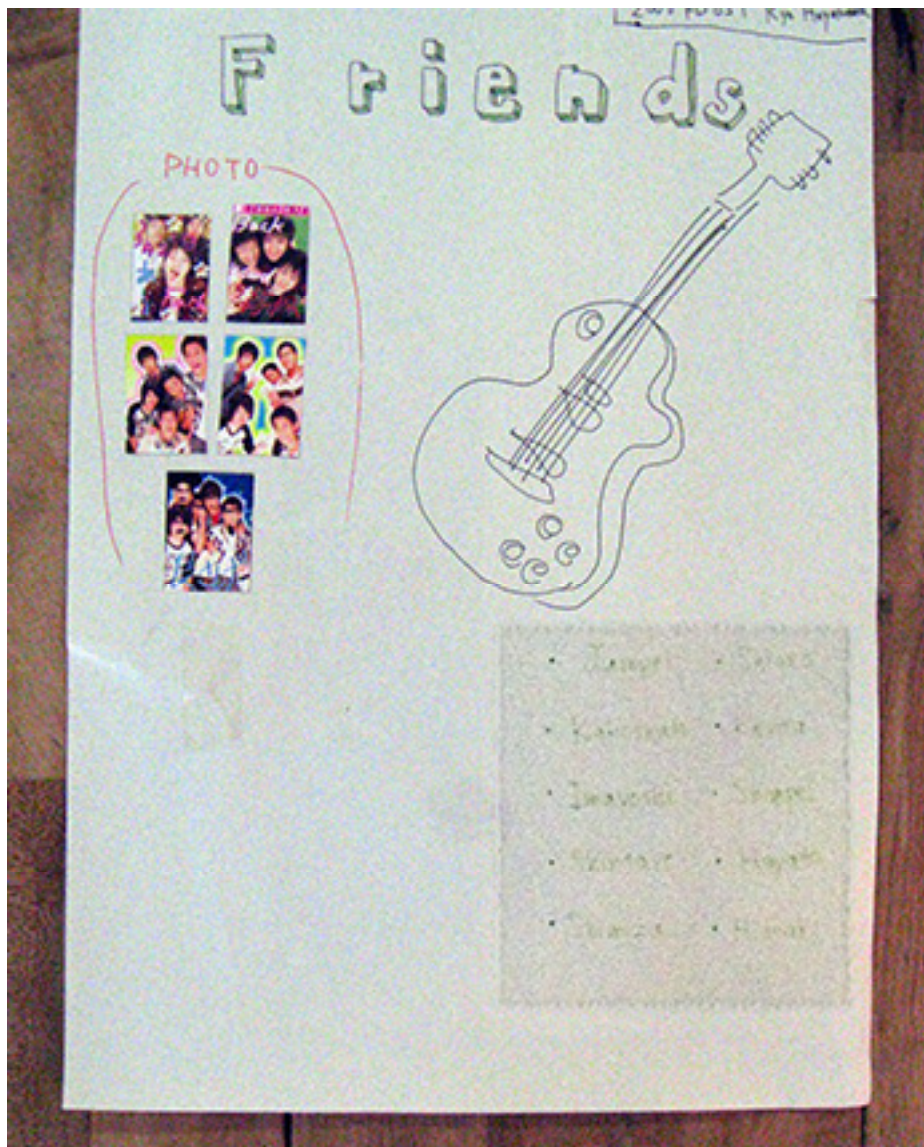




## Appendix B – An Example of a ‘Bad’ Scrapbook Page

Sometimes, students can learn as much from seeing a bad example as a good one, so Example 4 shows a page from a weak scrapbook. As can be seen, the photos are too small to be seen clearly and the student has clearly not spent much time preparing this scrapbook page.

*Example 4.* One poorly designed Japanese university EFL scrapbook page.



## **Appendix C – A Sample Student Handout**

### ***Do's and don'ts ...***

#### **Do...**

- Start off your presentation with a strong beginning, e.g. “Hi, I’m Toshiko. I would like to tell you about my family.”
- Be sure to give a strong ending to your presentation, e.g. “Thank you for listening. Do you have any questions about my scrapbook?”
- Use transition words to introduce each item on your scrapbook, e.g. “In this picture... or “If you look closely, you can see...” or “This photo was taken...”
- Explain why each item is important to you, e.g. “This is my favourite picture because it shows...” or “I chose this because...”
- Prepare at least a few sentences about each item in your scrapbook.
- Try to use simple English so that people can understand. If you use difficult words, explain them.
- Practice explaining your scrapbook before class.
- Speak in a loud voice, smile, make eye contact, and use gestures.
- Choose items that will be interesting for other people.
- Add colour and key words to make your scrapbook page look attractive and interesting.

#### **Don't**

- Read your presentation. If you practice, a few short notes as prompts on the back of your scrapbook page will be enough to help you remember.
- Prepare only just before your presentation.
- Practice your presentation while other people are explaining their scrapbooks.
- Be nervous! Relax and have fun sharing your scraps.
- Don't use very small items. You want people to be able to see your scraps.

### **Some possible items to use in your scrapbook:**

a photo, a concert ticket, a letter, origami, a postcard, a phone bill, a map,  
a candy wrapper, a receipt, a sketch, a CD cover, a newspaper article,  
an airplane ticket, song lyrics, a shopping list, a lock of hair, a birthday card,  
a new year's card, a Christmas card ...

it's your scrapbook – have fun, and make it interesting!