

Intro

One of the most important and challenging components of teaching [English as a Second \(ESL\) or Foreign Language \(EFL\)](#) is choosing an appropriate textbook. In most cases, educational institutions (i.e. schools, universities,...) choose their textbooks, and teachers have little or no say in such circumstances. In many cases, this works out well, as the curriculum is set and teachers bear little or no responsibility if the textbook is appropriate for their students or not. Schools may do this for a variety of reasons one of which may be kickbacks from the publishers. However, if you happen to be in a situation to choose a textbook for your EFL/ESL class continue reading this article as it may give you some tips on how to navigate through this challenge successfully.

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EFL and ESL Contexts

There is a vast difference between [EFL](#) and [ESL](#) contexts. One of those differences is that in the [EFL context](#), using a textbook is a must. Most parents, students, and schools in the EFL context want their English teachers to select a textbook for their class. There are many reasons for this. One of the reasons is that the book represents a benchmark level for future tests, a guideline of what was accomplished and what needs to be accomplished, progress, and a bit of prestige.

However, in most ESL environments, textbooks are not always a must, especially for the more advanced students. One of the reasons is that in ESL environments, students are often more interested in authentic materials, such as books, movies, and songs, which are not always found in textbooks. Most of the day [ESL students](#) are surrounded by English and encounter a lot of language issues, which they usually bring to class and inquire about. Teachers in such environments are expected to subject their lessons to their students' needs.

When choosing a textbook for your EFL or ESL class, there are several factors to consider. Here are some of the most important factors to keep in mind when choosing an EFL or ESL textbook:

Students' Level

1. The level of the students: What is the level of your students? Are they beginners, intermediate, or advanced? EFL/ESL textbooks are designed for specific levels. That's why it's important to know the

level of your students when choosing a textbook. If the textbook is too easy, the students will be bored and if it is too difficult, the students will be frustrated. How do you know what the appropriate level is? One of the ways is to do a pre-test on the skills you are going to teach in your class. A good starting point is the [CEFR](#) rating scale. [For more info read our article on CEFR rating scales and levels](#). You may also ask your students if they have taken any formal, recent English skills tests (i.e. [IELTS](#), TOEIC). This may give you an idea about the level of your students.

Keep in mind that there is nothing worse than a textbook that is not challenging enough or one that is too challenging.



Class Goals

2. The goals of the class: What are the goals of the class? Are you trying to improve the students' [speaking skills](#), their [listening skills](#), their grammar, or all of the above? Once you know the goals of the class, you can choose a textbook that focuses on those specific skills. Most major ESL/EFL textbook publishers have textbooks split into [Speaking & Listening, Reading & Writing, Speaking, Writing, and Reading](#). They also have textbooks on all skills.



In most schools, class goals are set by the school administrators. Those goals are usually in line with the CEFR scale. [See our CEFR article for more info.](#) If, however, your school does not provide the class goals, then you need to decide the class goals. One of the safest ways of doing this is to examine the textbook content and CEFR scale (if possible). You can get a lot of info from the textbook itself regarding the goals of each lesson, and unit (i.e. Teacher's Manual)

Students' Interests

3. The interests of the students: What are the interests of your students? Do they like reading, writing, listening to music, or [watching movies](#)? Choose a textbook that includes material that will interest your students and keep them engaged in the class. How do you figure out their interest? One of the ways is to give your students a questionnaire, before the semester starts, on what they want to learn in your English class. One of the questions in your questionnaire can be "your interests". This will give you a pretty good idea of what your students like. For sure, there will be a variety of interests, but you as a teacher need to balance it to make learning interesting for all.

Keep in mind that the content of the textbook should be interesting and engaging for your students. It should also be relevant to their lives and experiences.



Budget

4. The budget: How much money do you have to spend on textbooks? EFL and ESL textbooks can be expensive, so it is important to find a textbook that fits your budget. In recent years there has been a jump in the price of EFL/ESL textbooks. There are several reasons for that such as the cost of production (i.e. paper, ink, distribution,...), but probably the biggest reason is that most textbooks nowadays are sold in tandem with some kind of [online learning](#) component (i.e. Learning Management Systems). Now, these systems are usually user-friendly and lift a lot of weight for both teachers and students (i.e. communications, progress,...), but they tend to be costly in both maintenance and content creation.



One of the perks many publishers offer with the purchase of their book is that they give you access to their online materials for 1 year +. During the COVID-19 restriction, these online platforms were proven very useful and necessary. At the time of writing an average EFL/ESL textbook with access to online learning components usually runs around \$20-\$25. However, some textbooks may be a lot cheaper and a lot more expensive than the \$20-\$25 range.

Discuss it with your students

It's important to discuss the price of the textbook with your students. One of the reasons students should be buying a new textbook, and not a used textbook, is the fact that they will have access to the online learning components, which are proving to be more and more essential. Also, the filled-out textbook with other people's answers will not allow them to be able to respond to the questions with their own opinions and navigate through tasks using their background knowledge. So, that's why the textbook mustn't be used. These reasons may help you justify the price of the textbook you choose for your class.

TIP* Keep in mind that the price of the textbook should be reasonable. You don't want to spend a fortune on a textbook that your students may never use after your class.



Course Length

5. The length of the course: How long is your course? Is it a semester course, a year-long course, or an intensive course? EFL/ESL textbooks are usually designed for a specific amount of time. For example, most textbooks that are used in semester-long EFL/ESL courses have around 15 units. Each unit is designed to be covered in 1 week. That's why it's important to know the length of your course when choosing a textbook. Most textbooks are organized like a syllabus, including quizzes, tests, homework, appropriate activities, and games that build on vocabulary, knowledge, and skills in each lesson.

TIP* Keep in mind that the format of the textbook should be easy to follow and understand. It should be well-organized and user-friendly.

Class Size

6. **The size of the class:** Is your class small or large? If you have a large class, you will need a textbook with more activities and materials to keep all of the students engaged. If you have a small class, you can choose a more intimate textbook with fewer activities.

For large classes, the textbook is more appropriate. One of the most important reasons for this is that you will have to make a lot of photocopies of the materials you plan to cover each class. Now, as

a well-prepared teacher, you usually prepare more materials than you planned just in case a part of your lesson does not go well and you need to replace it with a plan B. This in the long run may create a lot of copies never used, and this is an unnecessary cost to you and your school.

However, smaller classes are better suited for not using a textbook. In a small class, the teacher gets to know each student well; their interests, level, and capacity. This way the teacher can tailor the materials better to better suit students' needs. Making photocopies will most likely result in using them effectively.

To Sum up

There are many factors to consider when choosing an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) or English as a Second Language (ESL) textbook, but in this article, we only mentioned, in our opinion, the most important ones.

Perhaps the best way is for you, as a teacher, to go to your local bookstore, if available, and based on the factors we discussed in this article, research the EFL/ESL textbooks. Read the author's notes to teachers and students, look at the tasks and exercises, and read some online reviews on the books you narrow down for your class.

We hope you find them useful should you consider them next time you need to choose an EFL/ESL textbook for your class.

TIP* Be careful of the reviews you're reading, as some of them might be biased.

Cite this article

APA: EFL Cafe. (2022, May 10). Tips on Choosing EFL/ESL Textbooks for Your Classes. EFLCafe.net. <https://eflcafe.net/tips-on-choosing-efl-esl-textbooks-for-your-classes/>
In-text citation: (EFL Cafe, 2025)

MLA: EFL Cafe "Tips on Choosing EFL/ESL Textbooks for Your Classes." EFLCafe.net, 10 May. 2022, <https://eflcafe.net/tips-on-choosing-efl-esl-textbooks-for-your-classes/>.
In-text citation: (EFL Cafe)