

Teaching with Authentic Materials: Ready-to-Use Activities for Teen Learners

Workshop handout

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Introduction

The activities in this handout are designed for teachers to adapt and implement in their own classrooms. Although the examples focus on teenage learners, they can easily be tailored to different age groups and proficiency levels, from A2 to C2.

Most ELT coursebooks include one or more units on travel, holidays, transport, accommodation, food, directions, or cultural experiences. Rather than replacing the coursebook, these activities extend it by allowing students to use the vocabulary and grammar they have already learned in meaningful, real-world contexts. Learners move beyond controlled practice and begin using English to solve problems, make decisions, negotiate, compare options, and communicate with a genuine purpose.

Teachers are encouraged to adapt the materials, destinations, budgets and level of support according to the needs of their learners.

Why Authentic Materials?

Authentic materials expose learners to language as it is used in everyday life rather than language created solely for teaching purposes. Menus, transport schedules, maps, advertisements, websites, museum leaflets, booking platforms and social media posts provide meaningful contexts that encourage learners to read, compare, negotiate, solve problems and make decisions. When tasks have a clear purpose, students focus less on "getting the grammar right" and more on communicating successfully. This shifts the classroom from practising language to using language.

Authentic materials also support **learner autonomy** by encouraging students to **search**, **evaluate** and **select information** independently. Rather than relying exclusively on textbooks, learners become active users of English outside the classroom, **developing digital literacy**, **intercultural awareness** and **critical thinking** alongside linguistic competence.

Selecting authentic materials

Please choose materials that are:

- ✓ visually engaging
- ✓ age-appropriate
- ✓ information-rich
- ✓ open-ended
- ✓ current
- ✓ culturally interesting
- ✓ able to generate discussion

Avoid materials that simply become reading comprehension exercises.

Instead, ask yourself:

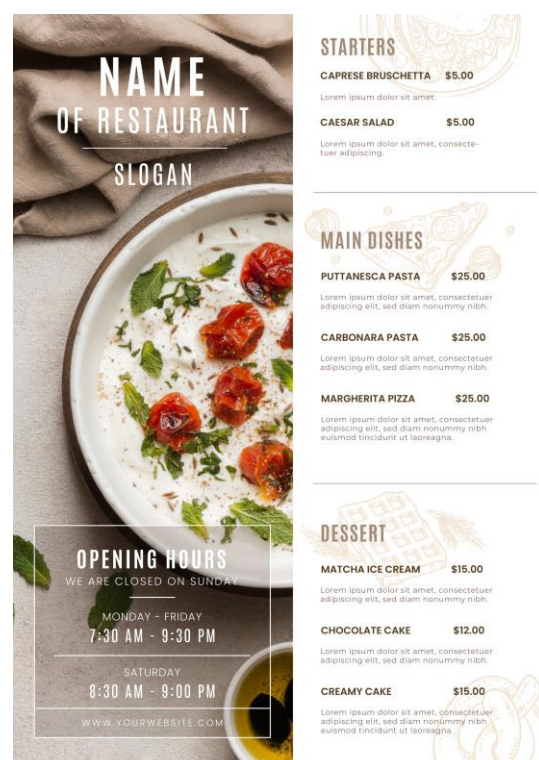
- What decisions will students make?
- What problems will they solve?
- What opinions will they exchange?
- What comparisons will they make?

Activity1: The Cultural Detective

Rather than asking students to identify facts about another culture, the Cultural Detective task encourages them to **observe**, **question** and **interpret authentic texts and images**. This inquiry-based approach develops intercultural communicative competence by moving beyond stereotypes and encouraging learners to base interpretations on evidence. Students practise describing, hypothesising, questioning and comparing while engaging with authentic language in meaningful ways.

Materials teachers can use

- Restaurant menus
- Tourist maps
- Event posters (concerts, football matches, theatre performances, festivals, etc.)
- Bus and metro maps
- Supermarket leaflets
- Museum websites
- Festival programmes
- Public signs
- Shopping websites
- Instagram posts



- Airbnb listings
- Hotel websites
- Airport information boards

Suggested Procedure

1. Students work in small groups.
2. Give each group one authentic image or document.
3. They become "cultural detectives" and discuss:

Observe

What can you see?

Interpret

What might this tell us about the people, place or culture?

Question

What would you like to know?

Connect

How is this similar to or different from your own experience?

Extra teacher prompts!

What do you notice?

What surprises you?

What questions would you ask?

What assumptions are you making?

What evidence supports your ideas?

How is this similar or different from your own experience?

Teacher Reflection

Language practised

- Describing
- Comparing
- Speculating
- Asking questions
- Expressing opinions

Skills developed

- Speaking
- Reading
- Critical thinking
- Observation
- Intercultural awareness

Possible extension?

Students create their own Cultural Detective challenge using photos from **a destination of their choice!**

Activity2: €500 Around Europe Challenge

Task-based learning is most effective when learners have a meaningful outcome to achieve. Rather than completing isolated language exercises, students work collaboratively to solve realistic problems using authentic resources. They negotiate, justify choices, compare alternatives and make decisions based on real-world information. Authentic materials provide both the language input and the motivation to communicate.

Giving learners a budget introduces genuine constraints similar to those encountered outside the classroom, making communication authentic rather than artificial.

How the activity works

Each student contributes **€500**.

Examples:

2 students = €1,000

3 students = €1,500

4 students = €2,000

5 students = €2,500

Students decide how to allocate their total budget.

They research:

- flights
- accommodation
- transport
- meals
- attractions
- emergency spending

Teachers may decide whether the budget covers:

- flights only
- flights and accommodation
- the entire holiday

Example Resources:

Airline Prices:

Route	Return Fare
Athens – Rome	€120
Athens – Paris	€185
Athens – Madrid	€210
Athens – Prague	€145
Athens – Amsterdam	€170
Athens – Vienna	€135
Athens – Budapest	€115
Athens – Berlin	€165

Sample accommodation prices (per room/night):

City	Budget Hostel	3★ Hotel	4★ Hotel
Rome	€45	€115	€190
Paris	€60	€145	€240
Prague	€35	€80	€150
Budapest	€30	€75	€135
Vienna	€45	€110	€185
Barcelona	€50	€125	€210
Amsterdam	€65	€160	€260

Sample Restaurant Prices

Breakfast

Location	Typical Cost
Paris Café	€8–12
Budapest Bakery	€4–7
Rome Café	€6–10

Lunch

Meal	Cost
Pizza (Rome)	€12
Goulash (Budapest)	€10
Burger (Berlin)	€14
Paella (Valencia)	€18

Dinner

Meal	Cost
Greek Taverna	€20
Viennese Schnitzel	€19
French Bistro	€24
Prague Traditional Restaurant	€15



Public Transport

City	Daily Pass
Rome	€7
Prague	€5
Budapest	€6
Vienna	€8
Berlin	€10
Paris	€12

Attraction Prices

Attraction	Cost
Colosseum	€18
Louvre Museum	€22
Prado Museum	€15
Budapest Thermal Baths	€28
Amsterdam Canal Cruise	€20
Sagrada Família	€26

Example Itinerary 1

Four Students

Budget: €2,000 (€500 per student)

Destination: Prague (4 nights)

Item	Calculation	Total
Flights	4 × €145	€580
Accommodation (Apartment)	€120 × 4 nights	€480
Public Transport	4 × €20	€80
Food	€30 per student × 4 days	€480
Activities (Castle, River Cruise, Museum)	Group estimate	€220
Emergency Fund	Remaining budget	€160
Total		€2,000

Example Itinerary 2

Five Students

Budget: €2,000 (€500 per student)

Destination: Budapest (5 nights)

Item	Calculation	Total
Flights	5 × €115	€575
Accommodation (Apartment)	€180 × 5 nights	€900
Public Transport	Group estimate	€120
Food	€21 per student × 5 days	€525
Activities (Thermal Baths, Parliament Tour, Danube Cruise)	Group estimate	€280
Emergency Fund	Remaining budget	€100
Total		€2,500

Optional Challenge Cards

Teachers may wish to increase the level of challenge by introducing realistic constraints such as:

- One traveller is vegetarian.
- One traveller has mobility needs.
- One traveller wants to visit museums every day.
- You must stay within a strict daily budget.
- You may only travel by train.
- You must include one free cultural activity.
- Your flight has been cancelled. Find an alternative route.
- One traveller has forgotten their passport. What happens next?
- Your accommodation has cancelled your booking. Find another option.

Extension Activities

Instead of simply presenting their holiday, students can:

- persuade another group to choose their destination
- write a travel blog
- produce Instagram posts
- record a travel vlog
- create a digital brochure
- compare two destinations
- redesign the holiday with half the budget
- redesign it for a family with young children
- redesign it using only eco-friendly transport
- justify every expense
- vote for the "Best Value Holiday"

Teacher Reflection

After the activity, consider the following:

Language practised

- Functional language
- Negotiating
- Agreeing and disagreeing
- Giving opinions
- Persuading
- Problem-solving language

Skills developed

- Reading authentic texts
- Speaking
- Listening
- Collaborative decision-making
- Critical thinking
- Digital literacy
- Intercultural awareness

Adaptation Ideas

A2–B1

- Provide selected websites.
- Limit destinations.
- Give vocabulary support.
- Use simplified budgets.

B2

- Students research independently.
- Introduce challenge cards.
- Encourage persuasive presentations.

C1–C2

- Compare destinations critically.
- Justify decisions using evidence.
- Debate ethical tourism, sustainability or overtourism.
- Design a complete travel proposal with contingency plans.

Authentic Materials You Can Use Tomorrow

Almost any real-world text can become an engaging classroom resource when paired with a meaningful communicative task.

Consider using:

Travel & Transport	Food & Shopping	Culture & Entertainment	Digital Resources
Airport departure boards	Restaurant menus	Museum websites	Google Maps
Airline websites	QR-code menus	Concert posters	Booking platforms
Train & metro timetables	Café advertisements	Football match advertisements	Instagram posts
Bus schedules	Supermarket leaflets	Festival programmes	Travel blogs
Ferry schedules	Shopping websites	Cinema listings	Travel vlogs
Bicycle rental websites	Restaurant reviews	Theatre programmes	Google Reviews
City maps	Shopping centre directories	Zoo websites	TripAdvisor reviews
Local tourism websites	Tourist brochures	Aquarium websites	Weather forecasts
Hotel websites		National Park websites	Event calendars
Airbnb listings		University campus maps	

Planning Templates: From Research to Real-World Decisions

The following planning templates are designed to help students organise their research and transform authentic information into meaningful decisions. Teachers can use them as ready-to-use classroom materials or adapt them by adding their own destinations, prices and resources. The templates support learners in comparing options, managing a budget, negotiating choices and presenting a realistic travel proposal. By working with real-world information, students practise English with a clear purpose while developing collaboration, problem-solving and decision-making skills.

- SCROLL TO NEXT PAGE FOR TEMPLATES

- CHANGE THE TEMPLATES IF YOU WISH

PRINT PAGES 10 & 11 OF THIS PDF FOR STUDENTS

Travel Budget Planner

Destination: _____

Number of Students: _____

Total Budget (€500 per student): _____

Length of Trip: _____



Flights:

Airline	Route	Departure	Return	Cost (€)	Notes

Accommodation:

Hotel / Hostel / Apartment	Location	Nights	Price per Night (€)	Total (€)	Notes

Local transport:

Type of Transport	Cost (€)	Number Needed	Total (€)	Notes

Meals:

Meal	Restaurant / Café	Cost per Person (€)	Number of Meals	Total (€)	Notes

Attractions & Activities:

Attraction / Activity	Cost per Person (€)	Total (€)	Why did you choose it?

Budget Summary:

Category	Budget (€)
Flights	
Accommodation	
Transport	
Food	
Activities	
Emergency Fund	
TOTAL	



Daily Itinerary:

Day	Morning	Afternoon	Evening	Estimated Cost (€)
Day 1				
Day 2				
Day 3				
Day 4				
Day 5				

Final Proposal (if they are to present or expand, ask them to use their notebooks)

Which destination did you choose and why?

Best cultural experience

Best value for money

One thing you would change if you had another €500