

# Materials Development: Creating a Textbook

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## Reference Data:

Heffernan, N. (2005).  
Materials Development:  
Creating a Textbook. In K.  
Bradford-Watts, C. Ikeguchi,  
& M. Swanson (Eds.) *JALT2004  
Conference Proceedings*.  
Tokyo: JALT.

JALT 2004 NARA  
Language Learning for Life

The need to adequately prepare first-year university students for their academic career is pressing. With this in mind, this paper will demonstrate how a textbook based on 'Study Skills for Japanese University Students' was created with the specific needs of Japanese university learners in mind. Since the textbook is for first year university students, these skills are meant to adequately prepare students for their upcoming university life. Each chapter (thirteen in all) gives students tangible skills that they can use in any of the courses they take at university; including reading, writing, note-taking, time management, health issues, giving effective presentations, and taking tests. The purpose of this paper is to outline the following: the rationale behind the creation of the book and its value for students; how the book was designed with student needs in mind; the pilot testing; the teacher's manual and initial contact and further dealings with the publisher of the text.

専門分野進級の準備として、大学一年時に十分な教育を行うことは非常に重要である。この事を念頭に置き、本論文は、日本の大学生のそのような要望に則った教科書「Study Skills for Japanese University Students」の作成過程の詳細について述べたものである。本教科書は、大学一年生を対象としており、彼らが進級後役立つ学習技術を修得する事を目標としている。全部で十三章あり、それぞれの章には、あらゆる専攻分野の学生に適用できる具体的な技術が記載されている(読み方、レポートの書き方、ノート作成、時間管理、健康問題、効果的なプレゼンテーションの方法およびテスト対策など)。本論文の目標は、以下の項目について明らかにすることである。具体的には、本教科書作成の背景や学生に対する貢献、学生の要望を念頭にいかに本教科書が作成されたか、作成過程で行った予備調査、教師用マニュアル、教科書作成時の出版社との交渉について明らかにした。

**T**he types of materials used in EFL classes are as important as the teachers who use them. These days, however, teachers seem to leave the task of creating new textbooks to others, simply hoping to find the right books for their courses. Although this may have always been the case in Japan, if we as teachers want to see more practical material on the textbook market, a more proactive approach by teachers is needed when it comes to materials development. That is, in order to avoid negative impacts on student and teacher motivation in the classroom (Hullah, 2003), we need to have more jurisdiction over the texts we use, and to exploit texts that are useful and interesting to our students (Nunan, 1999).

Research has shown that tasks in textbooks should be designed to enhance how learners learn (Candlin & Keboke, 1999). Given that L2 performance is significantly affected by the textbooks and syllabi used (Hullah, 2003), both need to reflect the values and needs of each teacher and their students (Hadley, 2001). Further, since a recent trend in language teaching is for teachers to take a materials-based approach to the materials they use in class (Hill, 2000), it is important to study this method of creating new textbooks. Textbooks can be many things to many people, but one of

the most important aspects of any textbook is to stimulate creative thinking and intellectual curiosity (McCarthy & Carter, 1994). This was further demonstrated by Simms (1995), who found that students who are interested in the books they are using do better on tests than those who are not. According to Brown (1997), textbooks should be useful to students and interesting for students and teachers. It was with all of these points in mind that the authors set out to create a textbook around the theme of “study skills for first-year Japanese university students”.

This paper will outline the tactics behind the creation of this- and any- textbook for the Japanese market. Chiefly, the paper will cover the rationale behind the creation of the book and its value for students. The main elements of the paper will focus on: the design of the book and how it was geared toward student needs; pilot testing; the teacher’s manual; how dealings with the publisher were conducted; and, finally, some advice for potential authors.

In this case, the authors wanted to create a highly unique textbook for Japanese university students: so unique that, according to the publisher of the book there has been no text of this sort on the Japanese market in at least the last ten years. The title of the textbook is “Top-Notch Students: Study Skills for Japanese University Students”, and was created with the express purpose of being an all-inclusive preparatory guide for Japanese students entering university. Each chapter (thirteen in all) gives students tangible skills they can use in any of the courses they take at university, including reading, writing, listening, speaking, vocabulary, giving presentations, taking tests, research skills, as well as day-to-day skills such as note-taking, learning styles,

time management, health issues, and a final chapter on their future. Each skill is dealt with in great detail and allows students to apply the knowledge learned from each chapter to their daily lives as students. The layout and form of the book provides students with proactive measures to learn the concepts behind each skill by participating in group discussions, exploring their own thoughts, writing in a journal, doing assignments, a presentation, and completing exercises designed to reinforce the crux of each skill.

Thus, the main goal of the project described in this paper was to create a textbook that would be of great use to first-year Japanese university students, and user-friendly for teachers who wish to use it with their classes. The user-friendliness of the book was manifested through its unique design: an all-encompassing one that is intended for teachers and students to simply pick it up and use it right away. The exercises are also geared toward user-friendliness, as they are explained in a straightforward manner and include space to complete them in the actual text, with other added supplements included throughout the text for easier use. Although creating an English language textbook is a long and arduous undertaking (in this case the project took approximately 14 months from start to finish), the authors felt it was a truly worthwhile experience; an experience worthy of sharing with our peers.

### **Rationale for the book and its value for students**

It became obvious to the authors that there were very few materials on the market that catered to first-year Japanese university students and the specific needs of such students as they make the transition from high school. These needs

involve preparing students to adapt to university life and the specific language needs of such students, including their methods of studying and becoming accustomed to the increased demands on them in a university English language classroom. The main objective of the book is to furnish students with better study habits and allow them to explore different methods of studying and dealing with university life successfully. The study skills covered in the book are all valuable skills for first-year university students to learn for their immediate and future use. This textbook was designed to assist students with more than just their university studies: it is also intended to encourage them to apply the skills inside the classroom and beyond, a method supported by Rivers (1981) and Decker (2004). These skills attempt to implement a work ethic that will be of service to them for years to come.

The difference between Japanese high schools and universities is great: High schools tend to be geared toward preparing students for the entrance examinations for university (Mulvey, 2001; Brown & Yamashita, 1995; Tsukada, 2001), while the goal of university is to teach them the skills or knowledge they need to enter the working world (McVeigh, 2001). Many foreign teachers at Japanese universities remember the rigors of their own university experience and feel the need to mold their learners into better students. However, the reality is that the Japanese university system is vastly different than its foreign (mainly Western) counterpart. Because of these differences, and the fact that Japanese students are often unprepared for university life, the authors had the impetus to create a textbook that would supply first-year students with the expertise and skills they need to be successful university students.

The skills covered in the textbook are not just study skills for English classes, but for all subjects that students take at a Japanese university. Although the textbook is written in English, the study skills in it can easily be applied to any subject, taught by instructors of any nationality.

### Design of the book: Student needs

Most textbooks these days have a uniform design. That is, the majority of texts on the market today have analogous formats to each chapter, with the same amount of pages and similar types of exercises appearing in them. Because of the perceived importance of this text (by the authors and the publisher), and the variation in each of the skills, we decided that each skill and each chapter would have to be written differently, with a dissimilar layout for each chapter. This allowed us to create each chapter to specifically suit Japanese students without the worry of space or content constraints. But, each chapter did have the following uniform traits: Finding Out (a discussion and/or written activity on the topic of the chapter, appearing as the first exercise in each chapter); Discussion Activity (a group discussion, randomly appearing throughout each chapter); and a Personal Study Skills Plan (the final exercise of each chapter where students write their thoughts about what they learned in the chapter in a journal). The purpose of these sections was to enable students to become familiar with the task at hand. By continuously writing and talking about the chapter topics students can practice the skills in the book and become well versed on how to execute them accurately.

The topic for each chapter was chosen with the exact needs of Japanese first-year students in mind. Upon serious

thought, the authors believed that each of the chapters should present students with a unique opportunity to learn the concrete skills they will use in their university careers. Therefore, chapters such as writing, reading, speaking, listening and vocabulary acquisition are designed specifically for first-year Japanese English-language students. They are catered toward these students and the weaknesses many students have in each skill. The chapters on learning styles, test taking, research skills, giving presentations, time management, the future and health were written so that students of every discipline can take the advice in book and apply it to all aspects of their school life. Naturally, each chapter is not a comprehensive outline of the skill it presents. Indeed, there are entire textbooks that deal with each of the skills in this book. However, the ideas and exercises in the textbook are intended to demonstrate to students how to achieve superior study techniques as well as how to properly prepare for their classes and other aspects of university life.

### **Pilot testing: Teacher and student reaction**

Once the thirteen chapters were complete the authors set about testing to see if they would work in a classroom situation. Five different teachers (three native speakers and two Japanese) were given three chapters each to use with any of their first-year students (seven teachers including the authors). The teachers came from the Business, Economics, Science and Information Science departments of a top-tier private Japanese university. The pilot testing was conducted over a two-week period and gave the authors some interesting insight into what they had created. Firstly, all of the teachers reported that the instructions for many activities

in the textbook were either not clear or needed to be simplified; a fact reiterated by many students. As a result of this, the authors went through each chapter and rewrote and/or simplified the instructions. Secondly, three instructors noted that the chapters they were given were too long and could not be completed in one 90-minute period. To rectify this problem the authors shortened some of the chapters mentioned by the teachers. However, the authors also had studied the form and style of many other texts on the market today, and found that most textbooks are of a similar fashion.

A quick review of some of some of the more popular textbooks used today revealed that many of these books are designed to supply information and practice skills, and may not necessarily be designed to fit into a 90-minute class. Therefore, the authors added a note in the teacher's manual to state that the book is intended to be completed in one 15-week semester at a Japanese university (and with twelve chapters in the book this provided some extra time for the longer chapters), but each teacher should thoroughly study the book before using it, and adapt it to his or her own students' needs. On a positive note, all five of the teachers used in the pilot test reported that the actual material and content of the text was either 'very good' or 'excellent'. Thirdly, the teachers gave the authors input on sections of the textbook that 'worked' or did not 'work' with their students. These are often personal feelings to do with the teacher and each individual class. Nevertheless, the authors did take serious note of what was said on these matters and made quite a few major and minor changes to the book to suit these comments. Lastly, some teachers claimed that some parts of the text were confusing for the students,

while others were confusing for teachers. When asked to explain these observations, it was pointed out that some of the activities were not clear to students and teachers alike. To solve the first problem, the authors again reworked and reworded a lot of the activities so that students would more easily understand them. To solve the second problem, the teacher's manual was rewritten to better suit teachers. The same chapters were then redistributed to the same teachers to see what they thought of the changes. All of the teachers stated that the changes made both books much easier to understand and more user-friendly.

### Teacher's Manual

Most, if not all, textbooks are accompanied by a teacher's manual. The teacher's manual is usually seen as a valuable resource to teachers wishing to supplement their lessons or aid their preparation for classes. Although one stipulation of the contract signed with the publisher of the book was that a teacher's manual had to complement the main textbook, a concern arose that not many teachers actually use the teacher's manual of most texts. So, the authors decided to distribute a short survey to a small sample of twenty native English-speaking teachers around Japan to find their opinions on teacher's manuals. Native speakers were used for the survey because of their perceived reluctance to use teacher's manuals. Before the actual survey was distributed, the authors conducted a micro-study of native teacher's opinion (with ten teachers at the same university) that supported this supposition. The results of the main survey of twenty instructors at five different universities in Japan found that thirteen of the twenty respondents 'hardly ever' or

'never' consult the teacher's manual for guidance on how to use the textbook (see Appendix A for full results). Further, of the thirteen who claimed they hardly ever or never use a teacher's manual, seven stated that the reason they do not use one is because the manuals are 'too inconvenient'. Lastly, twelve of the twenty surveyed claimed they would be 'more likely' to use the teacher's manual if it was incorporated into the student book. Five respondents said they would be 'less likely' and three said their feelings would remain 'unchanged'. Naturally, the sample size used is not large enough to allow concrete assumptions about teacher's manuals, but the authors were looking for a general opinion of these books. The results of the survey assisted greatly in the formation of the teacher's manual and the textbook itself in that the authors attempted to make the textbook inclusive enough for any teacher (or student, for that matter) to simply pick up and use straight away, thus contributing to its user-friendliness. The authors added the appropriate instructions in each section of the book to assist teachers in understanding how to best use it. However, the teacher's manual is useful for more extensive explanations of the exercises in the text, as well for supplying answers to the questions and exercises in the textbook.

Contrary to the findings of our survey, however, is research that states teacher's manuals are seen as an effective guide for teachers. In fact, Brown (1997) stated that most good textbooks are complemented by a teacher's manual. The teacher's manuals that are seen as successful and useful are the ones that give extra material such as quizzes, vocabulary lists and additional activities for teachers to use (Brown, 1997). Further, the point of the manual is to

give some insight into every exercise and activity in the textbook to allow teachers to teach smoother lessons. So, not only were the authors contractually obliged to create a teacher's manual, but we also felt it would eventually be of help to those teachers who wanted to utilize it. In the case of the textbook being described here, the teacher's manual attempted to do just that. Thus, in order to make the textbook more accessible to teachers, many of the extra activities usually associated with teacher's manuals were included in the student book, such as a journal for students to write their thoughts on each lesson, a photocopiable calendar for recording students' schedules, and general instructions on usage to both the teacher and the student.

Therefore, in spite of the generally negative view found in our survey, previous research has shown the need for teacher's manuals, so one was made with the hope that it will be useful to teachers. I also suspect that many teachers do consult the teacher's manual of a textbook when time permits. Seeing as we distributed the questionnaire at the beginning of the second semester of the school year, the timing may have influenced the results: this is a time when teachers across Japan are at their busiest. Hence, it is possible that when teachers are busy they may neglect the teacher's manuals of their prescribed texts, relying instead on their natural teaching instincts or existing knowledge of a text to assist them in their class preparation.

### Dealings with the publisher

Perhaps the most important part of this whole process is making contact with a publisher. As with most things in Japan, "who you know" is a vital factor when it comes to

finding a suitable publisher for your ideas. The idea the authors of this work had discussed with their publisher was an original idea that had not been explored in Japan at any time in recent memory. In fact, a search for textbook of this nature produced very few results, with no textbooks for Japanese students inclusively covering the amount of skills done here. There is, however, a surfeit of textbooks dealing with study skills for American and Canadian university and college students (see Ellis, 2000; Hjorth, 2000; Gardner & Jewler, 2001; Longman & Atkinson, 1999; Weckler, 1995). Our interest in these materials gave us the motivation to create a book for Japanese students. These factors made our pitch to the publisher stronger, as he was well aware of this dearth of materials in the market. The main difference between this text and the others in the market is its uniqueness: it had not been done before and was a book that could be of absolute benefit to first-year university students. Hence, the publisher agreed to go ahead with the project after our first meeting.

For this meeting the authors put together a Microsoft Excel file of the thirteen chapter titles with a short description of the content of each chapter. This was enough to convince the publisher that our idea was worth exploring and one that he could eventually sell. Naturally, as far as the publisher is concerned, selling books is the main goal and publishing companies are keenly aware of what constitutes best sellers in each area of language teaching (Hill, 2000). So, any idea presented to a publishing company has to appeal to both teachers and students alike for it to be successful. To this extent, the publisher suggested that putting a Japanese name on the cover of the textbook would certainly go a long way

to selling copies of the book. We unreservedly agreed to this since it was our Japanese contact (the Supervising Editor of the work) who introduced us to the publisher and provided us with the concept for the project in the first place.

The meeting with the publisher provided some basic information about how the process of creating a textbook would work. After meeting in September of 2003, the publisher informed us that the first draft of the book would have to be complete by the end of December of the same year. He wanted this draft to consist of all thirteen chapters in *skeleton* form. This meant that each chapter had to include the main idea as well as some example exercises. The publisher suggested that this skeleton should be approximately three pages per chapter. After the skeleton was approved in December, the authors had until April of 2004 to complete the full text. This involved taking the skeleton submitted in December and filling it out with the remaining material and exercises. In total, the entire textbook runs to 104 pages, including space for students' journal entries and references.

Although a feeling of relief accompanies the submitting of the final draft, some of the hardest work was still to come. Over the course of the next five months, more meetings with the editor took place, as well as a plethora of contact by email to clarify any problems that inevitably cropped up. Further, the editor delivered three galleys- or drafts- of the manuscript to be checked by the authors for mistakes, general editing and content changes. It was here that the authors learned about what kinds of icons and graphics the publisher planned to use in the book. The authors had very little input into this element of the text, and everything

concerning the layout of the book was up to the publisher. Having said that, the publisher was open to our suggestions on the placement of certain icons and activities in the book.

Details of the contract for this work stated that the authors would receive a ten percent share of any profits from the book, which seemed quite generous compared to other publishing companies (which, according to other teachers who have published books in Japan can range from four to eight percent). A key part of the contract stated that if the authors completed their work on the book on time (by April 2004), the publishing company would promise to publish the textbook by April of 2005, which coincided nicely with the start of the academic semester. As it turned out, all stages of the book were done well ahead of schedule, so the publishing of the text was pushed ahead to January of 2005. This worked out well for all parties concerned, as the publisher could advertise the book well ahead of the start of the new school year, and the authors were glad to have the project finally finished and were pleased to see the final product.

### Uniqueness and the market

As stated above, many of the textbooks in the market today have as similar layout and present the exact same arrangement of exercises in each chapter: this tends to get quite monotonous for both students and teachers. Most texts also tend to only focus on a few skills (for example: reading, writing, listening or speaking), instead of employing a more inclusive approach. Thus, there is very little flexibility in these books, as they constantly rehash the same skills and exercises (and possibly problems) that occur in every chapter. The text described in this paper attempted to move away

from this concept and present each chapter in a distinctive manner. Namely, multiple skills are presented and each chapter was written with the specific needs of Japanese first year university students in mind and how each would work within the Japanese language classroom. The authors took into consideration how students would then utilize these skills outside of the language classroom in their other classes. The needs of first year university language learners are explicitly addressed in this book: reading; speaking; writing; listening; vocabulary acquisition; research skills; and making presentations are all integral parts of our language classrooms. The rest of the skills in the text (most notably learning styles, note taking, goal setting, test-taking and health issues) are intended to assist students in keeping up with and making the most of their other coursework in university. The reaction of students during the pilot testing was taken into account in the final stages of the writing of the book: exercises that worked well were kept and ones that did not were scrapped. The fact that this book is infinitely different than anything else on the market made it that much more attractive to the publisher. How it will fare when put into larger circulation is a matter of great concern to its authors.

The needs of the market seem to play a large role in determining in which style of book a publishing house is interested. In the case of the work discussed here, the publisher saw an opportunity to develop a text that had not been done recently in Japan, and one that was potentially of great help to first year university students. Since most major publishers in Japan only publish between 25 and 30 new works a year, aspiring authors are advised to think of original ideas that have not been explored or overdone in today's market.

## Conclusion

Creating a textbook is a very time consuming process. However, if done correctly, the final product is an enormously rewarding piece of work. Assuming the correct amount of work has been put into the project, the end result should be one in which authors will be proud. The materials on the Japanese market today are of obvious importance to the classes we teach. However, there are still large areas of this market that have yet to be explored. Specific study skills for Japanese students was one of these areas; one in which the authors attempted to fill with the creation of this text. The success of every textbook is surely measured in sales, so the success of this text will not be known for sometime (the publisher agreed to provide a yearly statement of all sales at the end of each fiscal year). However, after having putting the text to use in many classes (by numerous teachers), the authors are very satisfied that the work they have produced is not only of great quality that will genuinely assist first-year Japanese students with their transition to university life, but is also a user-friendly text that will be a useful resource in our classrooms. Teachers interested in creating a textbook of their own should look at the prevailing factors in the market: what needs to be done, and how they can go about doing it. These factors will determine whether their ideas can add to the textbook market and be of use to the students in all of our classrooms.

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Appendix 1

**Table 1**  
**Teacher's Manual Questionnaire**

1. How often do you use a teacher's manual when teaching or preparing for your lessons?

always	usually	sometimes	hardly ever	never
2	2	3	7	6

2. If you use a teacher's manual, which reason explains why you use it?

very useful	first time using a book	it provides extra information (eg. answers)
3	4	6

(Note: some in the 'hardly ever' category answered here)

3. If you do not use a teacher's manual, which reason explains why you do not use it?

not at all useful	have my own teaching style	too inconvenient
2	4	7

4. If the teacher's manual was part of the student book, would you be more or less likely to use it? Or, would your opinion be unchanged?

more	less	unchanged
12	5	3

*Note:* Twenty teachers were surveyed.