

# Overhead Out of Sight? Some Alternatives

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When available, the overhead projector can save teacher time, create a more interesting and faster paced class, and allow use of both the overlay and revelation techniques to facilitate student understanding of complex concepts. When there is no overhead projector around, however, there is no reason to despair. Here are some alternatives if this wonderful teaching tool is not available in your classroom. Some will also prove valuable for small group learning; some more valuable in tutorial situations.

## Charts

Most of the five articles about the overhead recently published in the *TESL Reporter* ("Opaque Transparencies," "Move Your Furniture," "A Movable Man & Woman," "Teach Writing," and "Who's Who") can be constructed in the form of charts. For teaching two or three students, these charts can be made the same size as projected transparencies, from manila or colored folders. As group size increases, so can the size of the chart. Alternatively, more than one chart can be provided by the teacher or created by the students themselves.

For larger charts, ordinary butcher paper can be used. When multiple copies are desired, beautiful yet inexpensive charts can be made from blueprint paper. A very large piece of blueprint paper costs about a dollar at a local blueprint shop. In school systems where engineering drawing courses are taught, the equipment is usually available in house. You can make a master on tracing paper with marking pens, or you can cut out letters and designs in ordinary butcher paper to make a master which will produce white

letters where cut and intense blue where not cut.

One teacher created a six-foot long, one-foot wide time chart showing the events of a man's life. Illustrated with very simple line drawings were the baby's birth, family meals, elementary school, swimming (over a period of time), high school, an adolescent trip to see the Eiffel tower, college, a job, marriage, and the birth of a son. The physical length of this chart helped students see the relationship of past time to future time with swimming continuing over the school cycle. The chart proved to be a most useful way to teach verb tenses (e.g., *After he graduated from high school he went to Paris.*) Once the blueprint master was made, this chart could be (and was) shared with many other ESL teachers.

## Whiteboard

The new "whiteboard" and erasable marking pens have proved popular for business meetings. The inexpensive pens make brilliant colors and dry to a powder, easily erased. Lumber yards sell the same type of whiteboard (plastic coating on masonite) for about a dollar a square foot. A two by four foot piece can be used for classroom instruction.

This material offers many advantages to the old-fashioned chalkboard. Businessmen (and students) appreciate the excellent legibility which results from the high contrast between the white background and the vivid colors of the marking pens. Other advantages are its ease of cleaning, the lack of chalkdust, and its low cost.

The whiteboard can also serve as a feltboard. Here, colored cardboard shapes, such as the movable man, can be secured using one small piece of double-coated tape (available at office supply stores) on the torso only. The plastic whiteboard surface is not affected by the tape, which is removed easily from it but not from the cardboard. The brilliant white background creates a vivid contrast with the silhouette. The man's limbs can be manipulated by one student who calls on peers to describe or question the activity.

### Non-photographic Slides

Many ESL teachers have found non-photographic slides an inexpensive way to project visuals comparable in quality to overhead projector transparencies. Non-photographic slides offer the advantages of low cost (only pennies per slide) good quality, and easy storage.

To produce them, one makes a regular overhead projector transparency from a master with about twenty-five miniature pictures. These small pictures are then cut out and mounted in plastic or cardboard slide frames (either ordinary 35mm size or "super slides" with a larger image area but the same outside dimensions, 2" x 2"). For less than a dollar, many photocopy machines will make a page-size transparency, which will produce about twenty-five slides.

In most schools, finding a slide projector is not difficult. Because slides produced as outlined above are much more transparent than regular photographic slides, even a small, less powerful projector will project a good image--even in a lighted classroom. The whiteboard will serve as a fine screen.

### Free Printed Materials

The main reason teachers use overhead or slide projectors is so all students can see the material. An alternative is to provide copies of that material to all students. There

is an unlimited supply and variety of interesting, colorful printed materials that can be obtained at no charge and brought to the ESL classroom. Besides being free, these printed items fascinate students, who love trying their emerging skills on authentic language samples.

Many fast food chains and pizza parlors use colorful, appetizing, free menus for placements. These free menus will fascinate students, who can practice their reading skills and then practice ordering dinner. The government also supplies quantities of printed material, much of which is of great interest to people learning English, such as commonly used forms for taxes, insurance, etc. Or, collect labels from food cans, roll them to regain their original shape, and your students can use them to practice both their reading and conversation skills. When one class is finished, these labels can be saved for the next one in folders. Another interesting source of materials, both beautiful and culturally interesting, is greeting cards. After holidays, everyone discards them--unless you or your students have requested them.

With a little ingenuity and the desire to teach more interesting classes, you will come up with many materials (either free or inexpensive) of great value for teaching ESL--especially when you don't have an overhead projector available.

### About the Author

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