

Using University Catalogues as a Pedagogical Tool

Paul Borg

[borg \[at\] cc.matsuyama-u.ac.jp](mailto:borg[at]cc.matsuyama-u.ac.jp)

Matsuyama University

Matsuyama, Japan

Today, large numbers of Japanese students are enrolled on study programmes overseas; many others aspire to follow suit. University catalogues (prospectuses) play a major role in helping students to decide where to study and what type of course to choose. But catalogues can also provide a versatile teaching resource because they are interesting, informative, and relevant in a way that conforms with student expectations.

Catalogues (which can usually be acquired free of charge by writing to the secretariat of any college or university) can provide the basis for all the following activities:

Vocabulary expansion

- names of subjects/courses/departments/administrative divisions/university
- buildings
- academic titles

Reading for specific information

- content of specific courses
- application procedure
- course fees
- options re. accommodation

Reading comprehension exercises

Role-play activities

- application interviews with faculty member(s)
- discussing life at the university with a current student
- persuading parents to allow application
- school official trying to convince sceptical student to apply

Debate

- the virtues of one course vs. another or one school vs. another (based on the content of two different catalogues)

Some or all of the above activities may be used in preparation for the following project.

Project: Simulating the Publication of a University Catalogue

Some of the most rewarding classroom activities are those which focus on a range of skill areas, facilitate student decision-making, and create a tangible end-product. This project, which is designed to fulfil all these criteria, requires students to compose an English-language catalogue for their own university or college.

Step 1: Orientation

To launch the project, the teacher should chair an orientation meeting. The agenda should include the following items:

Dividing the class into groups

The students should be divided into groups, each with a leader. A separate role should be assigned to each group, e.g. to write profiles of one or two faculties to introduce the university clubs and societies

Setting parameters for the length of the catalogue and a deadline for publication

The scale and duration of the project will naturally depend on how much time is to be dedicated to it. The project could either represent the sole focus of study for a set number of classes or be featured as an on-going activity for the duration of a term or even a whole academic year (in which case, a certain amount of time could be set aside each lesson).

Arranging the procurement of photographic equipment

For visual appeal, the catalogue should feature photographs of the university campus and the town in which it is situated. If students do not possess their own equipment, cheap disposable cameras may be purchased.

Informing the students of the target readership.

i.e. exchange students from overseas

Clearly, the class size and the students' level of proficiency will govern some of the above items.

Step 2: Getting started

When the practicalities have been sorted out, the content should be determined through a process of brainstorming involving the whole class. Likely topic sections would include:

1. University philosophy
2. History of the university
3. Description of the university campus and the town
4. Academic programmes offered
5. Club activities
6. Profiles of certain departments and/or members of academic staff

Step 3: The writing process

Students should adhere to a disciplined writing process which includes drafting, revision of content, and proofreading.

Once the writing process is running smoothly, a special meeting should be held to discuss options regarding layout and final appearance. Decisions should be made as regards the use of maps, illustrations and photographs. As far as possible, student-made decisions should prevail.

Step 4: The final product

When the final drafts are complete, students should use computer facilities and type all content into a text file.

Teachers with a detailed knowledge of layout/DTP software like Quark or PageMaker and access to a scanner would be able to produce a polished finished product. However, standard word-processing software like Microsoft Word may also be used. The text can be laid out in columns (two per page) and arranged through a cut-and-paste method.

The completed publication should be photocopied and distributed to all students.

Follow-up activities

- a) A class discussion could be held in which students are encouraged to express their opinions as to what they liked/disliked about the project and what could have been done to make the end-product even better.
- b) The participants could show copies of their publication to students from other classes/departments or to members of academic staff and ask for feedback (possibly on the basis of a questionnaire). This feedback could then be presented orally in the class and discussed.