

Using Commercials In The Classroom

A Complete Guide



Why Use Commercials In The Language Classroom?

Commercials are the perfect material for teaching English, especially the “right” commercials!

Now that video is becoming a dominant media for bringing reality and context into the language learning classroom – it is time to start using them to their full potential.

Teachers should use commercials because of



1. Context.

Commercials are professionally produced and highly contextualized nuggets of meaning. Students can easily understand the context and this helps scaffold their language learning. You’ll find commercials which will cover almost any language point, theme or situation.



2. Length.

Commercials are short, usually 30 seconds. They don’t waste time and quickly get all students to focus around a singular goal. Their length gives teachers the flexibility to repeat, replay, review many times and recycle the language learning experience.



3. Expectation.

Great lessons include an element of “bingo!” or “gottcha”. This is key to student engagement and most commercials are designed with moments of “surprise”. They immediately motivate and capture the attention of students. They are “fun” and students love them.



4. Genre.

Commercials are familiar no matter what culture / country they come from. Students will understand all the conventions of “the commercial”. It won’t be an alien experience and this background knowledge helps students focus only on language. Commercials are specifically designed to be simple and direct in getting their message across to audiences across a wide cross section.

★ 5. Content

We don't just teach language, we also teach "ideas" and content. Commercials are perfect for discussing issues and for helping students develop digital literacy skills and especially media awareness.

★ 6. Cost

They are pervasive, they are free! Yes, companies and organizations *want* you to watch these for free, no payment needed. No copyright issues involved here – just download and use directly in your classroom offline.

Ways To Use Commercials In Your Lessons

✔ Engagement

Commercials are the perfect way to introduce a lesson topic or a unit of study. They prompt student schema and background knowledge and teachers can follow up with an activity on the same topic after introducing with a commercial.

Resource: [BFF Jill](#) is a commercial that would be perfect lead in for a lesson on textmessaging. Get Ss to write a story in "text message". Then have other students decode their text message story.



✔ Media Literacy

It is important that students learn to understand and critically think/interpret commercials. So take the time to ask students about the commercial and how it might effect them or others.

Resource: See [MediaWise](#) - an excellent animation about commercials. Also my [Commercial Analysis sheet](#) that students can fill out after watching.





Roleplays

Students can re-write the commercials and make their own versions. These are often incredibly hilarious and get them using the same technique as the original commercial but with a different product.

Resource: use the handy blank commercial script template at the end of this guide.



Vocabulary tasks

Commercials are strongly situational and thus provide a perfect opportunity to focus on thematic vocabulary. List some vocabulary on the board - some in the video and some not in the video. Have students watch several times and circle/check the vocabulary that is mentioned. Or also have students choose a vocabulary item from those in the video and they can play - [Last one standing](#). They stand/sit when their word is mentioned / seen.



Resource: [The Force Be With You](#) is a video you can use to teach places in the home. There is a lesson sheet provided.



Prediction and guessing

Pause the commercial just near the end. Get students to either predict the ending or guess the product. The majority of commercials these days have surprise endings so commercials are perfect for this kind of language prompt.

Resource: [Thai Tuna commercial](#) is great for this. Just stop before she gets into the elevator! Also could be used for Media literacy/awareness or discussion.



ANALYZING TV COMMERCIALS

“The medium is the message” – Marshall McLuhan

In this lesson, we will look at TV commercials and ways to introduce and use them in the classroom.

We will try to understand commercials and the ways the messages they contain.

Activities will include: Watching commercials, Watching for Media messages, Making and presenting your own commercial



1.  Let's watch [4 commercials](#). Which commercial do you think is the best? Why?

Commercial

Why I think it is great.

2. Commercials are powerful media tools. They inform and shape minds, especially the young minds of our students. Let's watch the video – [Media Wise](#) and learn about some of the ways commercials influence us.

After, complete the quiz and see how “Media Wise” you are!

NOTES

1 An ad is a commercial that tries to sell you a product.

TRUE or FALSE

2 Why is learning about commercials an important life skill? (Choose only one answer)

because commercials teach you about life

because commercials tell you what tastes the best

because you need to learn how to make good buying choices

because you need to learn which commercials are the most expensive

3 What does it mean to jump on the bandwagon? (Choose only one answer)

to jump onto a wagon

to do the opposite of what others are doing

to watch commercials

to do what other people are doing

4 If a commercial played your favorite song, which technique would they be using? (Choose only one answer)

music

powerful language

colorful packaging

famous people

5 A commercial for cereal has a cartoon character on the front. Which technique was used? (Choose only one answer)

music

powerful language

colorful packaging

famous people

6 If you were watching a commercial with Michael Jordan, which technique was used? (Choose only one answer)

music

powerful language

colorful packaging

famous people

7 If a commercial makes unclear claims about a product, they are using which of the following? (Choose only one answer)

music

powerful language

colorful packaging

famous people

8 What is the BIGGEST reason that companies make commercials? (Choose only one answer)

because they want your money

because they care very much about you

because they want you to be happy

because they want you to be healthy

9 An advertisement in a magazine is called what? (Choose only one answer)

a print ad

a band wagon

a commercial

a product

10 What is the BEST way to find out if a product is good? (Choose only one answer)

watch the commercial

ask a grown-up who has tried it

listen to the jingle on the radio

see if it has an ad in a magazine

1-5 = You need to wisen up! 6/7 = You are pretty aware 8-10 = You are in control!

Analyzing Commercials.

Commercials have specific purposes. They want _____

_____.

They have 3 specific components.

1. **Who** – Target Audience.
2. **What** – The Content or Message
3. **How** - The Hook. How they get the audience's attention.

Watch [the following commercials](#) and as you watch. Fill in the chart below and discuss with a partner afterwards. Which of these commercials did you like best? Why?

	Product Name	Target Audience	Hooks used	What is the message?	Effective? Why? Why not?
1					
2					
3					
4					

PRACTICE

Read and Practice this commercial. Perform it for the Class!

A: I've been worried about my _____ recently.

B: Really? What's the matter with your _____?

A: Well, it isn't _____ enough and I don't know what to do.
Do you have any idea?

B: Yes, I do. Have you tried _____?

A: No, I haven't. Does it make _____ er?

B: It sure does! I remember when I was worried about my _____.
One day someone told me about _____. I started
using it and now everybody in _____ tells me I have the
_____est / most _____ in
town!

A: Thanks for the advice. I'll go out and get some right away!

B: You won't regret it!

