

In this issue:

CUE AT PANSIG 2019

TWO FEATURE  
ARTICLES

CUE CAREERS



# CUE CIRCULAR

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News and articles from the JALT College and University Educators Special Interest Group



University of Niigata Prefecture, Niigata City. (The venue for PanSIG 2020)

Photo by Melodie Cook

## Summer is coming...

Welcome to our eighth issue, coming out just after this year's PanSIG conference. We're presenting a shorter format from this issue, with two rather than three feature articles, and the regular CUE Careers column. First up is a highly applicable and practical article from Bill Pellowe, overflowing with ideas that you might be able to start using in class right away. Adam Smith's article is a thoughtful insight into students' experiences, drawing on a lot of one-on-one time with students in a writing center. The CUE Careers column delves into professionalism and professional ethics.

As you read, please consider writing an article of your own for *CUE Circular*! Everyone has some idea, insight, or advice that others will benefit from reading.

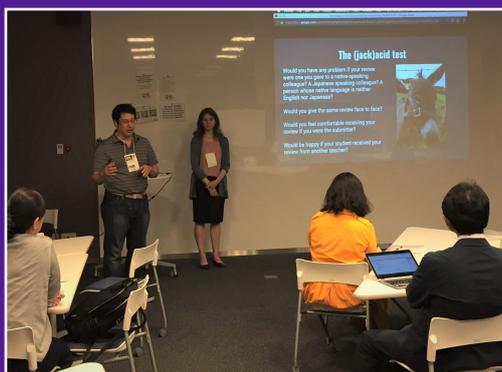
Please enjoy this issue of *CUE Circular*.  
*Steve Paton, Editor*

## CUE at PanSIG 2019

The CUE SIG forum at PanSIG 2019 was held to share information from a new reference book by Paul Wadden and Chris Carl Hale. Five speakers representing chapters from the book *Teaching English at Japanese Universities. A New Handbook* (2019, Routledge) included Curtis Kelly, Asako Takaesu, Donna Fujimoto, Melodie Cook, and Jenifer Larson-Hall.

Jamie Taylor (CUE SIG publicity chair) later talked with Joe Tomei on how people should review conference abstracts. This was an excellent presentation about what they might face and how to overcome the challenges. They showed how to examine submissions and to provide critiques whether the abstracts were accepted or not.

The CUE information table was quite active as usual. The highlight as seen by publications chair Glen Hill was talking to several visitors who were very recent newcomers to Japan. Those teachers had only 3-6 months of experience here, yet they were quite curious about the publication process for *OnCUE Journal* and *CUE Circular*.



*CUE activities at PanSIG 2019.*

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## Feature articles

### Creative variations for textbook conversations

**Bill Pellowe, Kinki University,  
Fukuoka Campus**



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Many of the textbooks that teachers use in language classes contain some kind of model dialog for students to practice. These dialogs are usually also available in audio form. Beyond having students simply either listen to or read these conversations aloud, what are the best ways to utilize this section of the chapter?

When I began teaching in Japan in 1990, the most popular textbook series was *Streamlines*, which had a very detailed teachers' manual. It encouraged a very specific approach to the dialogs, combining traditional audio-lingual drills with nods to the communicative approach (such as personalizing the drills to the students and their surroundings). Since then, I've used a lot of textbooks, and the teachers' book for each one has had similar yet different approaches to the dialogs.

This article combines my years of accumulated experience with teachers'

manuals, conference workshops, JALT chapter meetings, and talking with other teachers, to give you several options for making the most of sample dialogs. Trying different combinations of options can bring variety to your classroom. I'm sure many of these ideas will be familiar to veteran teachers, but I hope everyone gets at least one new idea.

Taking the process to its most basic level, the students will be doing four things:

1. looking at the artwork for context,
2. listening to the dialog,
3. reading the dialog, and
4. studying the language of the dialog.

These look like ordered steps, but we don't have to go through them in that order. You could, for example, start by having the students listen with their books closed. On the other hand, you could study the language of the dialog first, then read, then close the books to listen. You can re-order these four steps for a total of 16 ways of doing the dialog, so please view this article as a series of options that are available to you at each step, and be aware that you can rearrange the steps.

#### **Pre-listening**

Before students listen, we should set up the context for them. Here, we have a few options:

- Students look at the illustration in the textbook but cover the conversation. Try to co-construct the situation with the

students (“How many people do you see? How do they feel? What are they doing? What do you think they’re talking about?”).

- Instead of looking at the illustrations, have students keep their books closed. The teacher’s pre-class task is to find three photos online to show to students. Talk about each situation with the students. Tell students that they will listen to the dialog and have to choose which of the three photos matches the conversation best.
- You also have the option to pre-teach language. Before one dialog featuring “can’t” and “must” to show certainty, I showed the students some photos I’d found online. One was of a man with a giant Superman logo tattooed onto his chest. (“Which superhero do you think he likes? Does he like Superman a lot? You think so? Me too. Look at that tattoo. He must love Superman!”) I then have the students repeat the key sentence as a chorus. Another photo showed two twin girls. “Do you think they’re just friends, or are they sisters?” This leads to, “They can’t be just friends. They must be twin sisters.”

You can also pre-teach reduced pronunciation (e.g., “wanna”), unfamiliar vocabulary items, and discourse features (such as “Hey, guess what?”). I usually pre-teach these by first putting them up on the whiteboard or on the screen, often with some context. An option is to tell students to discuss the meaning in pairs.

Later, while listening, one option is to have the students raise their hands when they hear the pre-taught items.

- If your textbook has videos for the dialogs, one pre-listening option is to show the video with no sound. Then, you can elicit responses based on the video (“How do they feel? What’s happening? What do you think they’re saying?”). Some dialogs include a shift in emotions, such as when a character starts off worried, but then feels relieved, or when one character becomes irritated with the other. If so, re-watch the video (still without sound) and pause to ask how they feel at that moment. After you’ve established the shift in emotions, the students’ listening task is to find out why this shift happened.

### **Listening and Reading**

This section focuses only on the actual listening and reading of the dialog, and we’ll ignore everything else for the moment.

- Your first option is to have the students listen first without looking at the dialog. They can either keep their textbooks closed, or they can open the textbooks but cover the dialog with their hands. In my lower-motivation classes I don’t mind if students peek at the dialog, because this indicates curiosity. In my higher-motivation classes, I’m pretty strict about not letting them peek.
- When it is time for students to read the dialog, you have three choices: they can read it silently, you can read it to them slowly while they read it silently, or they

can read it together chorally.

- One option is to add a “read while listening” step. Note that it is actually difficult for many students at lower to intermediate levels to read fast enough to actually keep up with medium-to-natural speed dialogs, so you might want to include pauses in the audio. An option here is for students to read silently while mouthing the words: a form of shadowing.

### Comprehension Questions

At some point, you’ll want to ask some comprehension questions. They are multipurpose:

1. you learn what the students could understand;
2. students who did not understand have a chance to catch up;
3. you and the students have a chance to use some of the new language in context.

Of course, there are different types of questions and options associated with them. Please note that you could actually do all of these question types with a single dialog, giving students a reason to go over the dialog multiple times.

- One option is to ask open-ended questions (“Tell me what they talked about” or “Discuss with the person next to you what this dialog was about”). This tends to work better if the students know beforehand that you’re going to ask the question (“After we listen twice, I’m going to ask you this question”).
- Another option is to offer multiple-choice questions. One technique with

multiple-choice questions is to give the students the questions before listening and show them the answer choices after listening.

For example, before listening, ask the question:

*What theory is in Alex’s book?*

After listening, show the responses:

1. *Aliens helped the Egyptians build the pyramids*
2. *The pyramids are really UFOs.*
3. *Egyptian people came from another planet.*

- A third option is to match L1 equivalents for phrases or vocabulary items. In a textbook dialog, one character invites the other out to dinner, and says, “My treat!” The question I gave my students was:

*Which “treat” means the same as “My treat!”?*

A: Ann was treated for diarrhea.

アンは下痢の治療を受けた。

B: My father still treats me like a child.  
父はいまだに私を子供扱いする。

C: I’ll treat you to dinner.

夕食をおごる。

(All examples are taken from ウィズダム英和辞典, the free dictionary included with Mac OS X).

- I like using this option when a familiar word is being used with a meaning that the students may not be aware of.

### Answering Questions

How will you have students answer these comprehension questions? You have several distinct options:

- Call on individual students. This is my least favorite option because I feel that students tend to stop paying as much attention after they've been called on because they know that they won't be called on again soon.
- Choral answers (all students talk at once). This can work fine with some groups of students, but if you have a class with a few students who always answer, the rest of the students may just come to rely on those outgoing students to carry the load.
- Use a student response system (such as Kahoot! or a clicker system) or a low-tech version (students hold up colored paper or answer paddles). This is my favorite option because it puts pressure on all of the students to maintain their attention.

### Practice

Eventually, we will want students to practice this dialog. Some teachers believe in the value of having students memorize a dialog, while others are content to have students rely on their books in order to speak the parts of the dialogs. The following options all fall somewhere on the scale between memorizing and reading aloud.

- Easiest option: Students just read the dialog to each other. This is the least useful option.
- An option that uses students' short-term memory is the "Read, look up, speak" technique. The rule here is that students must maintain eye contact while one of them is speaking. The

person who is speaking can pause to look at the dialog if needed, but they don't speak while reading.

- One option that is actually more fun for students than it sounds is the *kuroko* technique. (In Japanese theater, *kuroko* are the stage helpers dressed completely in black.) In this technique, students work in groups of three. One student is the *kuroko*; she is the only one of the three who has an open textbook. The other two students do the dialog without textbooks while the *kuroko* provides hints (in L2 or L1). When finished, the students rotate roles. Continue until each student has done each role once. (It's my opinion that the students learn the most while acting as the *kuroko* helper, since they hear their classmate's errors and supply corrections.)
- An option that leads students from reading to memorizing is the gradual erasing technique. Write the dialog on the board or put it up on a screen. The students do the dialog in pairs with the "read, look up, speak" option described above. When the students finish, erase a couple of parts of the dialog, and have the students switch partners to do the dialog again. You can keep doing this until the dialog is completely erased.
- One option for the gradual erasing technique is to replace some of the text with hints in the form of images or perhaps L1 words to help students remember the dialog.

- If your students are flexible, they may enjoy paraphrasing the main gist of the dialog, focusing on the meaning over the form. This option is actually difficult to get students to do because they believe that they are supposed to memorize the dialog.

### **Follow-up Activities**

After you have done the dialog, you have the option to expand it through follow-up activities.

- Students can create their own version by substituting words or phrases. If you have them doing this in pairs, make sure each student in the pair writes their own copy of it, so then you can get them to switch partners, and do the new dialogs with the “Read, look up, speak” technique described above.
- You could re-examine the conversation in detail. For example, you could focus on anaphors (pronouns which refer back to something mentioned previously in the conversation). In one textbook dialog, the two characters are talking about one person’s new neighborhood; when the woman asks if there’s a gym in the neighborhood, the man says there isn’t, but “it’d be perfect if there was one.” In this situation, you could ask students “What does ‘it’ mean? What does ‘one’ mean?” These questions could be discussed in pairs, or you could give them multiple-choice questions with several options from the conversation.
- Have a short conversation rally. Conversation rallies are controlled drills with two lines of students facing each

other. Take a short question / answer exchange from the dialog, and have students modify it into their own question with follow-up questions (for example: “Do you like movies? What have you seen recently?”). All of the students in the class stand up in two lines facing each other to have their short conversations. After a couple of minutes, tell the person in the front of the right line to go to the front of the left line, and have everyone shift positions so that they all have a new partner.

### **Dialog Performances**

One of the options for a follow-up to the conversation is to have the students do a conversation performance. The pressure on students to do the task well leads to more effort. The performance aspects can include a focus on gestures, intonation, and pronunciation. If you want to do a dialog performance, you have several options:

First, who is the audience? You have four options here:

- Pairs in front of whole class.
- Pairs in front of groups (half of the class, one-third of the class, etc.).
- Pairs in front of only the teacher.
- Pairs on video (using students’ own smartphones or devices supplied by the teacher). You have to decide if the videos are to be shown to the class or only the teacher.

I like using videos in my Business English class because so many of the dialogs lend themselves to performances with gestures. One dialog has a character introduce a coworker to

a visitor from an overseas branch office.

What dialog? There are three options:

- Use the textbook dialog as is. This option is pretty boring.
- In pairs, students write their own variation of the textbook dialog.
- In pairs, students make their own creation based loosely on the textbook dialog theme, language, or situation.

To memorize or not?

- Students memorize the conversation, and you let them choose which side each person will perform.
- Another memorization option is to have both students in the pair memorize both parts. Before the performance, roll a dice to see which part each student will perform.
- An option with less pressure is to allow students to hold a written dialog or written notes.

The last option to consider with performances is whether or not to give a grade for the performance. You have four options here:

- No grades; the performance is its own reward.
- Give a grade to the pair (in other words, the same grade for both students).
- Give a grade to individuals (so, possibly a different grade to each student in the pair).
- Do peer feedback. Peer feedback is easier if there is a video of the dialog.

### To conclude

All teachers reading this have their own way of approaching the textbook dialogs,

but I hope this article gave you some new ideas or new variations on old ideas.

### Endnote:

Many of these ideas were originally posted in a podcast episode on ELT Podcast: The Teachers' Lounge, "Using Textbook Dialogs in EFL Classrooms" (Bill Pellowe, Kevin Ryan, and Dominic Marini; February 12, 2007; available <http://www.eltpodcast.com/archive/lounge/dialogs.html>)

These ideas were originally presented at the JALT 2014 Conference. Variations were later presented at a few other locations in Japan.

### *Submit an article!*

What's happening in your teaching?

What obstacles have you overcome, and how?

What ideas or opinions do you have that others might be interested to read?

What have you read, heard, or seen recently that's changed your approach to teaching, either in or out of the classroom?

CUE Circular aims to publish quality, interesting, practical articles about the day-to-day nature of teaching in our sector.

[www.jaltcue.org/cuecircular](http://www.jaltcue.org/cuecircular)

# Observations from a university writing center

**Adam Taylor Smith, Toyo University**



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Working at a university writing center has given me a new perspective on helping Japanese university students improve their English. In contrast to teaching in more traditional classroom settings, the one-on-one environment here has allowed me to more directly connect with students, learn about their academic lives, and observe clear results of instruction and feedback that I give. What follows are some of the realizations that I have made through helping university students improve their academic writing in this setting.

## **Japanese academic writing is very different**

In my first few months in this position, I was surprised to find that many students who possessed relatively high levels of proficiency in the language were unaware of basic principles of formal English writing. They often did not know that a paragraph consists of a topic sentence followed by supporting sentences, and

that one paragraph should cover only one topic. I had made the mistake of falsely assuming that there must be a similar logic to writing in Japanese.

Kimura and Kondo (2004) detailed several fundamental differences between how English writers and Japanese writers are taught to write. The authors noted that Japanese essay writers, rather than seeking to present a message or information clearly, generally aim to move readers. In addition, they found that Japanese writers of English tended to confuse the concept of a paragraph with that of *danraku*, a much more flexible Japanese compositional structure containing nothing equivalent to a topic sentence or supporting sentences. Such underlying differences highlight the need for teachers to check students' foundational understanding of English writing when beginning to work with them and to review or teach essential principles if necessary.

## **Having students make an outline is crucial**

Teaching students to make a clear outline of what they intend to write in their essay is the single most effective technique I have found for instilling organizational conventions of academic writing in English. I start by showing them an example essay and a corresponding outline, drawing their attention to how each piece of information in the outline (essay topic, paragraph topics, and supporting points) is written out in the example essay. I then ask them to create their own outline for their essay topic. Once they have done this, I make sure

that I understand each paragraph topic and supporting point in their outline, and help them rewrite their ideas in a more natural way if necessary. Taking this step is extremely helpful not only for the students but also for me: it ensures that I will be able to follow what students write in the actual essay, mitigating the risk of me being stumped by unintelligible text later on.

### **Go for quality over quantity**

When first starting to teach at the writing center, I was of the opinion that the more students wrote, the better at writing they would become. While I still believe extensive writing has benefits, when it came time to provide feedback on students' academic writing I quickly came to appreciate quality over quantity. In our brief 30-minute lessons we often have time to go over only one or two paragraphs, so there is little point in requesting students to write much more than that. In addition, shorter writing assignments allow me to highlight the importance of being concise in academic writing and to put greater emphasis on students making the time and effort to carefully proofread their own work.

### **Students can self-correct errors in their writing**

When students have already proofread their writing before seeing me, our lesson time can be used more effectively. I have found that students are often capable of spotting and correcting many of their own writing mistakes if given proper incentive to do so. One way of encouraging this habit is to create a "proofreading rules" sheet customized toward mistakes that a

particular student has made in the past and to direct the student to check their writing for the errors listed on the sheet before submission (Smith, 2018). Additional rules to check for can be added over time so that students compile a comprehensive picture of the kinds of mistakes they tend to make, so they can become adept at avoiding making them again.

### **Progress is often slow**

Even though I do often have the satisfaction of witnessing improvements in my students' writing, I am also regularly reminded that significant progress is not measured in days or weeks but in months and years. Effective academic writing is a very nuanced and challenging skill to master. Students inevitably need a great deal of time, motivation, feedback, practice, and exposure to examples of strong academic writing in English in order to make substantial strides forward.

### **Students appreciate the personal connection**

Based on their feedback, I have found that many students appreciate having some speaking time at the start of our lesson where they can transition into "English mode" and make a personal connection with the teacher. Connecting personally allows students to feel that their instructor cares about them and is not just here to mark their paper up with red ink. Having created a warm, supportive, and empathetic environment at the start of the lesson, I can then move forward with a great deal of corrective feedback on their writing without the risk of students

taking such criticism personally. Moreover, the one-on-one setting of writing centers can encourage students to enjoy sharing experiences from their lives that they would not normally discuss with teachers in larger classroom settings.

### **Most students face time pressures outside academics**

One thing that has struck me from listening to Japanese university students talk about their daily lives is that many are juggling multiple responsibilities outside of their studies. A large number participate in club activities that can take up a great deal of their free time. In addition, most are working part-time jobs where many, due to the nation's labor shortage, are pressured to put in extra shifts, resulting in work schedules that can sound as if they are more full-time than part-time. I had one sleepy student tell me that she had stayed up until 4:00 a.m. speaking on the phone with officers in her club, who had been unable to start their call until a key member arrived home at 1:00 a.m. after finishing the late shift of his part-time job. While in an ideal world their studies would always come first, hearing about situations such as this has helped me keep in mind my students' busy schedules when giving out assignments or assessing the quality of their work.

### **Students take advice to heart**

The vast majority of the students who come to our writing center are doing so of their own free will, out of an honest desire to improve their English writing ability. It is a joy to work with such motivated learners and to see them endeavor to

apply advice that they are given. Even though progress can often be slow, I have the satisfaction of witnessing my students' confidence in their written English grow little by little.

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*CUE Circular*

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## CUE Careers

### Professionalism & ethics in academic employment

Recent headlines throughout mass media worldwide have exposed serious ethical failures occurring in work environments that have spanned industries from entertainment to government. Exposure of these incidents has led to ruined careers and loss of income for the perpetrators, and some measure of vindication for the victims. The scintillating news stories are egregious examples of unprofessional behavior and ethical lapses, and present us with clear lessons on how *not* to behave in the workplace, how to be ethical, and how to create a more professional career image.

Firstly, how do we define *professionalism* and *ethics*? *Professionalism* is the competence or skill expected of a professional as opposed to a layperson; it implies a higher standard of behavior, higher quality performance, and more responsibilities. *Ethics* are the moral principles that regulate a person's behavior or the way they perform an activity (dictionary.com). As educators, we have both formal and informal expectations for our ethics and professionalism. These expectations govern how we interact with colleagues and students and how we behave both inside and outside the classroom.

In this regular column, Michael Parrish and Richard Miller offer insights on the employment market for college and university language teachers in Japan, as well as general career guidance, advice, and strategies.

Contributions from readers with specific areas of expertise, or regarding specific issues or changes in the job market, are encouraged.



Michael Parrish and Richard Miller are the current co-coordinators of the Job Information Center at the JALT National Conference, and are former editors of the Career Development column in *The Language Teacher*.



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#### Professionalism

One way both concepts can be exemplified is through the use of an academic CV (ACV) and the balanced scorecard (Miller, 2011a; Miller 2011b; Parrish, 2014). These documents provide a way to define what is expected of us professionally as well as helping us to determine in which areas we might improve in our careers. Educators are expected to participate in professional development in the form of research, study, training, attending conferences, or publishing. Professional academics are also expected to volunteer to help better their institutions. These activities are reflected as items on the ACV (Parrish & Miller, 2017).

Other aspects of educational professionalism are competency and flexibility. First and foremost, educators should be seen as competent by both their

students and their employers. They should have pedagogical competency combined with the ability to remain calm and project confidence and authority even under adverse conditions. A *professional* educator resolves to ensure that goals are met; this may require flexibility and extra costs so that the lesson goes forward, in spite of equipment malfunctions or other roadblocks. A professional educator makes sure that commitments to assist a colleague or student are met, even if outside consultation is required. Professionalism occasionally requires doing more than what is stated in the contract. This may require spending longer on something than ‘regular’ working hours. If there are transportation issues, it might entail taking a taxi to ensure you arrive on time. Just as when we deal with students, there are no ‘the dog ate my homework’ excuses for professional academics. Keep in mind that staff, students, and colleagues are not very interested in the underlying reasons for not meeting a commitment. They do not want to hear that the printer did not work and therefore there is no handout. They want the lesson to go smoothly, with or without a handout. Spending the entire time complaining about the equipment is not professional. A *professional* is always prepared, and when unexpected exigencies arise, they have a viable back-up plan.

### **Ethics**

Ethics in the educational workplace focuses mainly on honesty and human relations. Academic honesty means not misrepresenting degrees earned or work experience on your CV. A quick online

search can quickly reveal inconsistencies. It means avoiding plagiarism in your publications and respecting copyright in your use of classroom materials. It means expecting the same of your students.

In terms of human relations, education is a very personal profession. We constantly have to be aware that as teachers, we are not only authority figures with our students, but also looked up to by the society. This power is often abused. The stereotype of a professor sleeping with students for grades is, unfortunately, not entirely false but is entirely unethical. All students should be treated equally regardless of gender, and sexual innuendo or extra-curricular social relationships should be avoided. It also includes giving marks based solely on performance, not other monetary or social considerations. Private email or SNS contact with students not related to classroom-related issues should be avoided.

Aside from sexual harassment, there is the issue of power harassment. While we strive to inspire and motivate our students with positive reinforcement, at times they sometimes disappoint us. Ensure that criticism and scolding relates to a behavior or a particular action and does not become a personal attack. Remember that an angry response can have unintended effects because of the power dynamic. Be careful of personal jokes about appearance, ethnicity, or origin. There was a case reported in The Japan Times where a teacher made an ill-considered joke about a student from Fukushima to ‘break the ice’. The student was deeply offended and the instructor

was penalized financially and his contract was not renewed (“University Disciplines Teacher”, 2017).

Taking professional short-cuts and doing unethical things may be convenient or expeditious, but the long-term rewards of professionalism and ethics are less stress and a longer career. Keep in mind that in this internet-connected world, any unethical action will likely find its way onto the web. This applies to behavior both in and outside of the classroom. Criminal acts, even relatively minor misdemeanors that occur away from school, could affect your employment status. You represent your institution wherever you are. Remember, that clerk at the convenience store or the waitress at a local izakaya may be your student, or a friend of theirs. You do not want to do things you would not want your mother to find out about on the evening news.

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