

M.A. TESOL Project Ideas from Susan Conrad
(5/6/13 version)

Reminders about doing a project

1. A project should address a particular practical problem in the field of TESOL or applied linguistics. A project is not an academic research study like a thesis. Instead, a project should focus on producing a solution to a language-related problem in a specific context. For example, a project could design the curriculum for a new level in an existing ESL program, create teaching materials for a specific group of learners, or develop and document online learning materials.
2. A project should be do-able in one quarter. Think small. Then think smaller. Most students find it works best to get their Project Plan written and approved the quarter before they do the project.
3. Students who do the project option must take the "Empirical Research Writing" course.
4. You need to get necessary background for the project you want to do. This means planning your courses carefully! If you might be interested in one of the projects here, talk with me about background courses you need.

PROJECT IDEAS

1. Develop materials integrating grammar instruction into high intermediate and advanced-level speaking/listening and writing (or reading) courses in an EAP program. Background: Some IELP instructors are wondering how the program could incorporate grammar even more into speaking/listening, reading, and writing classes at the higher level. A very useful project would be to create materials that cover the use of grammar features integrated into other skill-focused courses.
2. Develop materials for teaching grammar features that are typical of American English conversation, as will be covered in the IELP's proposed Culture and Communication Track. Students in this track won't want traditional grammar and vocabulary activities. They will want to use and be able to comprehend features that are typical of casual conversation. (You could consider using the Corpus of American Soap Operas.)
3. Use the "BA 101" corpus, designed by Linda Boekelheide, Jared Kramer, and other PSU students, and create business English materials. See Linda's MA Project for more on the corpus and more materials development ideas.
4. Write an article for a teacher magazine/newsletter about why an M.A. in TESOL is worth the time, money, and effort if you want to be an ESL teacher. Alternatively, focus on just one experience you had as part of the M.A. program, describing it and analyzing and discussing its impact on you as a teacher or other language professional.
5. Develop corpus-based Academic Word List vocabulary teaching materials that can be used as supplements for specific IELP courses or as tutoring materials in the Learning Center. Tutors need materials that show the AWL words in typical academic contexts!
6. Create a workshop or online training materials to teach teachers how to use the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) website. Have the teachers conduct useful example searches as they learn basic skills they can use in the future.
7. Develop materials for teaching academic grammar, vocabulary, and/or genre organization, based on the PSU Corpus of Student Academic Writing, for IELP students or students in another academic intensive English program.
8. Expand the PSU Corpus of Student Academic Writing by collecting a large sample of student writing from the IELP or another department at PSU. Update the documentation of the corpus. Give examples of the usefulness of your addition (sample materials, for example).
9. Design a basic online concordancer to be used with the PSU Corpus of Student Academic Writing. (You obviously need some programming skills for this project, in addition to knowledge of what concordancers typically do.)

10. Write an article for a teacher magazine about how your experience with corpus linguistics has affected your view of language.
11. Design a workshop about corpus linguistics for in-service teacher training at a program you currently teach in or hope to teach in the future. (Several of our graduates have ended up introducing new colleagues to corpus linguistics.)
12. Continue where Brittany Peake left off, creating teaching materials about lexical bundles that are useful in academic writing. See Brittany's MA Project.

Courses for background (in addition to required courses)

- Corpus Linguistics in Language Teaching – for any project using corpus linguistics
- Grammar for TESOL – for any project related to grammar
- Curriculum Design & Materials Development – especially if you have little teaching or materials writing experience and want to do a project developing materials