

Introduction

The Basics

(Audience surveys – write down on the board)

Why do we use Audio Visual aids?

Audio visual aids serve several purposes in the ESL classroom. They can be used to help explain your point, to attract and retain student's attention, improve their response rates and provide a welcome respite from the occasionally monotonous nature of foreign language study.

What constitutes a good AV aid?

When it comes to audio visual aids, the skies the limit! Virtually anything you can think of can be marshalled into usage as an audio or visual aid. The problem is kee

How should we use audio visual aids?

The key to using an audio visual aid is not depend on it. Before you even start thinking about what images to use, or start picking out CDs for class, you need to have a strong, well thought out lesson plan to attach your aids to. The worst thing you can do is to use an audio visual aid as a crutch to cover for a lack of planning or as a substitute "last minute lesson plan" in lieu of something substantial. Lessons which utilise audio visual aids should offer something of value to your students beyond just "let's look at pretty pictures". I'll cover usage suggestions specific to different media later on in the presentation.

Effective Visual Aids

1. Size Matters

Few things are worse than having a killer visual aid and then getting up to the front of the class, holding it up and then realizing that it is too small for anybody to see! For this reason, you should always keep in mind your class size and layout when designing a visual aid. Two major things that conspire to make using visual aids difficult in Japanese classrooms are the relatively large class size (40 students usually, if you're lucky maybe only 20, but that's still a lot!) and the rigid rows of desk stretching all the way to the back by number!

For these reasons, you should take care to ensure that your visual aid is of sufficient size that it can easily be seen all the way in the back of the classroom. Understandably, this is sometimes difficult to do due to practical considerations – we can't always be creating meter long flashcards or pictures! In these situations, there are a couple of things you can do:

1. Re-arrange the students. If the JTE is willing, you can often get the students to move closer to the front of the classroom (towards you). Of course, this depends on available space – if you're only teaching 20 students in a classroom designed for 40 you can obviously get them closer than if you have 40 bodies in 40 desks. Something to keep in mind is that once Japanese students are seated they are often quite reluctant to move out of their rigid desk order – I can't count how many times I've told my students to put their desks together or move to the front of the class just to be met with blank stares and uncomfortable shifting in the chairs (nobody wants to be the first to get up!). For this reason, I have found that if you know you want to re-arrange their seat order, it's best to do it as students are still filing into class between periods – they're much more relaxed and willing then. Even if you have a full class, it still is possible to at least re-arrange the desks to be a little closer (*TRY TO GET THEM INTO A SAME RE-ARRANGEMENT PATTERN ROUTINE!*).

2. Bring the visual aid to them. If your JTE isn't willing to let you re-arrange the class layout, or if the students just are willing to move around, you can always bring the visual aid to them by walking around holding it. If the students are in a rigid row pattern, you can usually get the two rows on either side of an aisle at one time. But assuming 40 students in a class, this still leaves around 50-60% of the class with no idea what you're going on about as you're walking down any given aisle. For this reason, if you're going to walk the visual aid around to the students, try to make two copies so your JTE can walk one copy around at the same time as well – teamwork, right?

Keep in mind however, that it is generally a very bad idea to *pass the visual aid around*...! This is true even back home, and doubly true in Japan where students are very easily distracted. If you pass something around, chances are the class is instantly going to stop listening to you as they focus on whatever it is that's making the rounds – worse yet, you can pretty much expect to be interrupted by a constant stream of “sugoi, ne!”’s and “hheeeehh!Omoshiroii!”’s as students take the opportunity to examine every little detail of your carefully crafted visual aid – the tape, construction, the people in the picture, the color of the print, the way you stapled it together – everything, that is except what you *actually* want them to focus on. So except for very certain situations, always make sure *you* bring the visual aids to the student and *you* hold on to it all the time! Besides, if they want to get a closer look, they can always come up to you after class, which is a great opportunity to chat with them in a relaxed fashion!

3. some combination of the two. Finally, keep in mind that you can also get the students to re-arrange their desks into “pods” or “groups” of 4-5 students each. This gives you a *lot* more space to walk around, and you and the JTE can then easily bring the visual aids to many students at once without having to trip all over yourselves, bags, umbrellas, bentos and whatever else hangs off those silly hooks on the sides of student's desks

and clutters the aisles!

2. Colorful is good!

While size is good for allowing students to actually see your visual aids, it's imperative that once they see it there's something there to *keep* their attention. One of the best ways to do this is to use color in your visual aids. If you stop and think about it, the majority of handouts and tests which students receive are printed on the cheap, low quality recycled paper favored in Japanese schools and most of it comes out of the high speed mass copiers as a dark, blurry, ink smudged mess. Since this is what students are used to, if you use a lot of bright, clear colors in your visual aids, it's easy to see how this might help keep their attention. Colorful visual aids are good regardless of the medium you choose – be they flash cards, video clips (don't choose dark, dimly lit scenes! They can't see anything, especially in the back!), computer slideshows (keep in mind that often LCD projector/computer screen quality is often less than optimal in the middle of the day!), pictures from home, etc. I'm not saying everything has to be a Monet-esque explosion of colors, but just like birds are attracted to shiny, colorful (and glittery!) things, so too are your students. (not that I'm comparing Japanese students to erm... birds..)

Color need not only be present in pictures as well. Using a consistent color scheme across things such as cards showing grammar points or sentence patterns (for example, verbs are always red, or main objects are always blue, etc.) can help subtly reinforce and prompt answers by adding visual cues for students to go off of. It's a perfect example of (*FINISH THIS*)

3. Keep it simple.

Be careful not to overclutter your visual aid. Remember, visual aids are precisely that – something to aid towards understanding what you're talking about. They are not (should not be) a means unto themselves, and for this reason, it's important that your visual aid be clear, concise and not confuse your students instead of helping them! Towards this end, keep it simple. Use one visual aid to illustrate one thing – don't try to squeeze too many things out of any one aid – if you're making a flash card, use simple shapes and clear, large, unornamented lettering. Make sure to use dark ink and big broad strokes. If you're using a movie, then make sure there's not TOO much going on in any given scene. If you're putting up a map, try and find one with the countries just painted in simple, clear colors – do you really need topographical information and the time zones in there? If you're bringing in a model, think about it carefully – if you want to show your students your stamp collection, do you really need to bring in your precious intricately engraved rarities hermetically sealed in complicated oak display cases? Wouldn't it be better to make a big blow up of one or two of the simpler ones?

If possible, especially for flashcards, try to go for abstract or stylized representations of what it is you want to show. Not only will they avoid distracting the students by incorporating unnecessary details (“wow, what team is that baseball player's uniform from!?” when all you really want to do is prompt the phrase “I play baseball”, for example) but they are often easier to make “look nice” and are printer toner friendly to boot (the Kyoto sensei's tend not to take too kindly to you printing off 48 huge full color A3 sized photo posters at a time).

4. Maximize your usage

That having been said, one of the things that often hinders the effective usage of visual aids is having the students become so enthralled with your large, beautiful – but simple – colorful masterpieces that they completely forget the language point they're supposed to be learning altogether! Even if you have carefully synched up your visual aids to an accompanying worksheet, it can often be difficult for students to flip back and forth between their worksheets and the visual aid – much like taking your eyes off the road while to look at the speedometer takes a few seconds to switch focus, process and look back - even though the two are literally next to each other. In exercises where you're using visual aids to cue student responses, this can often be terribly confusing and impeding.

For this reason, you may wish to consider putting some forms of prompts on your visual aids. This doesn't have to violate the suggestions above – it's possible to put subtle, but clear hints on your visual aids without disrupting the overall colorfulness or simplicity. *(SHOW CHUO VISUAL AID AND HOW TO USE IT!! / TALK ABOUT PRE-WRITING STUFF ON CHALKBOARD FOR JHS LESSONS THEN STICKING VISUAL AIDS ON THE BOARD NEXT TO THE PROMPTS – IMPORTANCE OF WORD & AID BEING PROXIMAL)*

5. Stay Organized!

Okay, so now you've got this great set of large, colorful, simple but effective visual aids made. Wonderful, right? Flush with confidence, you step up to the front of the class, start into your lesson plan, whip out your visual aids – and then suddenly realize that you have no idea what order they're in! Or worse yet, which one goes with what language point you're trying to teach! Few things will kill your air of professionalism like having to stutter, stammer and fumble through a large pile of (increasingly disorganized) visual aids trying to find what comes next. For this reason, make sure that you have everything well sorted and organized ahead of time – this means not just the order of the visual aids themselves, but also knowing which one goes where in the lesson. If you're using a computer to show a photo slideshow, then take a moment to print out a slide show index (*SHOW THEM!*) – if you've got a large pile of flashcards or whatever, then write little numbers on the back in pencil, etc. This is a simple point, but one that suprisingly gets overlooked a lot of the time!

6. Think outside the flashcard

Visual aids can be so many things besides just flashcards! Flashcards are relatively easy to prepare and straightforward to use, so they are often favored by ALTs just starting to dabble in using visual aids. Of course, a properly designed flashcard can be highly effective and there's no doubt that they should constitute a significant part of your "visual aid collection". But don't forget about the countless other types of visual aids!

For example, you can use slides, pictures, charts/graphs*, models, overhead projectors, picture*** books, postcards, maps, video** and much much more!

*I know that it seems strange to suggest something like a "chart" or "graph" but it can work very well to get students to look at data and construct essays from it (*TALK ABOUT SPORTS/LIESURE COMM LESSON!*)

**More about "video lessons" in a bit.

***Pictures of you – especially with weird hairdos or from high school are a huge hit with most students. I have one (particularly sad) picture

of me sporting a remarkable mullet at my SHS graduation (which I use when talking about differences between Japanese/American schools) which the students always go crazy over, though I have to admit that a little piece of my soul dies whenever I look at it. In my defense, I will point out that this particular style of haircut is still very much in fashion in Japan!

Besides these things however, there are a whole host of other types of visual aids which go beyond the one way flow of “teachers shows, students look”. Often times visual aids can be used interactively to draw students into a lesson. For example, you can bring a model or prop from home and let students touch it or examine it (one of the few times when you should actually let the students handle the visual aid, and *make sure your prop is relevant to your language lesson. For example, self intro lesson bringing something of yours*). (OTHER EXAMPLES: *students are great with kneaded erasers! For a VERY SIMPLE class, I practiced having JHS students model simple vocabulary to review what they’d learned before: animals, school objects, etc.*)

Also, don’t forget that your *students* can generate visual aids as well! For example, once I (*had students draw pictures based on a description to practice basic vocab/adjectives*). Finally, your students can also bring their own visual aids. While obviously this is only applicable to certain types of lessons, one example was a recent JHS lesson which I did wherein the students had to write and present an essay about their “most treasured thing” (or as my JTE with a very strange sense of humor insisted on referring to as “Myyyy Prrrrrecciousssss...” I think the humor escaped most of the 11 year olds in the class...) and when they presented they had to bring in the thing they were talking about, which actually proved to be quite interesting and helped alleviate some of their nervousness (amazing how a baseball mitt or whatever in hand can do!)

! Keep in mind that doing classes like this where the students are either touching your visual aid or are making something themselves, while “fun”, also require excellent class management skills to keep students on track and maintain the lesson point and pace. You’ll need your JTE on board (especially if you have a more “old school” JTE – you don’t want him/her thinking that all the ALT does is let the students run amok with kneaded erasers or scribbling drawings all over! They’ll never let you use visual aids again!)

7. Prepare it ahead of time/professional

(students are inundated with tons of cheap recycled paper, and crap monoprints from mass hi speed copier. They can tell if you just hacked something together in 5 minutes, or if you drew it by hand. It looks like what it is – cheap, rushed and like you didn’t care. I’m not saying you need to rush out to kinkos/local copy shop or print everything on heavy duty cold press board, but try to make it look decent. If you’re going to print something out, tape it to a rigid piece of card stock so it’s not flopping everywhere (*you can reuse same piece of cardstock if you’re low on it!!!*) Don’t draw something by hand if you can avoid it! Use a computer! If you MUST do something by hand, at least use a ruler for straight lines and steal some lettering stencils from the art club! If you’re going to “tape together” a collage, at least run it through the copier once to create a nice copy if you can (*USE EXAMPLES FOR GOOD/BAD VISUAL AIDS!*)

Don’t draw pictures – take the time to google pictures from the internet – (give list of good sites) – it looks so much better and retains their interest. Lineart is best and sometimes “stylized” or “abstract” pictures can look

better on a hand out than a single pasted on photo.

Try to keep a "box" model in mind when framing your pictures. You're not making art here, yet in a way, you are, since some of the same principles apply. Try to keep it centered, and don't "cut things" off (show a bad example). If you can get an image with lots of "white space" around it, that'll work great for centering things! (use *photoshop extract command, magic wand, etc.* tell them you can use MS word's page layout view and change the page size to simulate the exact layout and position everything exactly and just print it out at A3 size or whatever directly) PENNY ARCADE REMIX type activities.

NEVER EVER USE CHALKBOARD UNLESS YOU HAVE NO CHOICE – takes so much time (DEMONSTRATE!) – if you MUST then prepare well ahead of time!

8. Integrate your visual aids!

Usually this isn't too much of a problem since if you're using visual aids chances are you've got a pretty firm idea of what you want it to illustrate. Nonetheless, visual aids tend to work better if they are used in a well thought out fashion and integrated into the lesson plan. For example, don't just hold up one or two pictures for some random part of the lesson then drop them and never reference them or any other visual aids for the rest of the class. It's too random and seems "tacked on". By contrast, if you have a "series" of visual aids that looks like they go together (perhaps to illustrate successive portions of the lesson) then you will tend to get a much better reaction from students. I'm not saying you need to have a massive art collection amassed for each class, but try to avoid the "haphazard" approach.

LEAVE TIME FOR STUDENTS TO TAKE NOTES/ANSWER – BEWARE OF "RUSHING" when using a visual aid!

Video in the Classroom

These are some pointers you may find useful when using video

1. Keep it short.

There is nothing wrong with throwing on a video at the end of the year for students simply to watch. In a genuine video class, however, the footage should *never* exceed a few minutes at a time. Two minutes of carefully selected video, if used appropriately, should be enough to cover at least 15-20 minutes of class. If you want to show a lengthier segment, make sure to break it up into several segments.

2. It's gonna be hard.

Many people mistakenly believe that video lessons are an easy thing to do, or can be used a "filler lesson" or in a pinch when you don't have something concrete prepared. Unfortunately, nothing could be farther from the truth! Video lessons require a lot of preparation, good class management skills, attentive students and to top it all off, are filled with all sorts of (often technical!) things that can go wrong! This is not to dissuade you from using video in the classroom, but just be aware that proper preparation is a must!

3. Don't use video just for the sake of it.

A lot of times ALTs can get sucked into the trap of using video "just because" – either because they want to be "edgy" and "innovative", or because they want to indulge the students by having a "fun" lesson. While it can be gratifying to hear the students "ooh" and "aah" the first time you fire up the LCD projector or spin up the DVD player, this gratification will quickly turn to vexation if your students lose interest in the first couple of minutes! There's nothing wrong with wanting to dazzle the kiddies, however, remember that your job is to teach and thus whenever you introduce video into the classroom, you should be sure to attach it to a solid, well thought out lesson plan teaching sound language principles. Doing so will ensure that once the initial "wow" factor wears off, the kids – and the JTE – will still have something of substance to hold their attention.

*Speaking of not using video "just for the sake of it", take care to ensure that your video lesson is not just a glorified listening activity.

If all your questions are based on the dialogue in the clip, then what is the point in using a visual aid?

4. Context

The biggest advantage of video in the EFL classroom is its use in setting a context. Students are far more likely to remember a class if there is a relevant visual presentation to back up the content. Try to make sure your video is used as part of a theme running through the lesson. Don't just throw a random video exercise into the mix from out of left field and then abruptly segue into something unrelated. Use video to back up the wider context of your lesson, not the other way around.

5. Turn off the TV

Remember back when you were a kid, and the teacher would show a video tape or something, and then, when the video was done, they'd just press "stop" on the VCR but leave the TV screen on? And remember how, even though the screen was black (or worse yet, it'd show "Input 1 – no signal" in the upper right hand corner!) and the teacher was going on about other presumably more interesting things at the front of the class, you just

couldn't *stop staring at that blank screen...!*? And how you just couldn't help but hear that high pitched, almost inaudible electronic whining? Well, your kids are just the same as you and I. Turn off the TV/projector *everytime* you're done with the video part of things, or else they'll just stare and stare at that blank screen and tune *you* out.

6. Don't underestimate setup time

Video lessons invariably require a bit more preparation time than normal lessons, especially the first few times you do them. Try to give yourself an extra bit of time to set up before class begins – usually the 10 minutes between periods is just the right amount of time to get everything wheeled into place, plugged in and set up. Don't expect to dash into the classroom just as the bell rings and get everything up and running in a minute or so – that's just asking for stuff to go wrong!

7. Use digital media if possible

If you can, try to use DVDs or media files on a PC. There is nothing wrong with video tapes, especially if that's all you have to work with, however, it's much faster and simpler to locate sections of film on a DVD or computer. In addition, digital media is much quicker, clearer and quieter than tapes. Japanese students are quite easily distracted, as most of you already know, and while it may seem hard to believe, something as simple as the sound of a tape forwarding or rewinding can really disrupt their concentration.

8. Have a plan B.

It may be as simple as walking into class with that "emergency backup" set of worksheets you always carry around "just in case", or it may be as complex as a whole other lesson, but no matter what, always make sure to have a "plan B" when giving a video lesson. There are countless things that can go wrong during a video presentation – another teacher could be using the room you were planning on using, the TV might be broken, a cable might be missing, your computer could crash... So make sure that you're well prepared in case any of these things come to pass!

9. Time of Year

The time of year can sometimes be a factor in deciding when to give video lessons. As most of you have probably noticed by now, Japanese schools are generally not constructed to the same level of physical quality you might be used to back home. For example, in my school, all the classrooms have massive windows on both the hallway side and the exterior walls, and only the latter has curtains. Unfortunately, those curtains are pretty much useless at keeping out sunlight, and in conjunction with the light streaming in from the hallway windows and glaring off the TV screen, it makes watching videos in the summer a dubious prospect at best! Even in the case that you may be lucky enough to have a school that is equipped with a proper A/V room with thick dark blinds, remember that in the summer the only way to escape the oppressive heat in schools without air conditioning (which most Japanese schools lack) is to open the windows – but that won't do you any good if you have to draw those heavy black drapes in order to keep the room dark enough to see the video! For this reason, I generally try to plan my video lessons for the autumn and winter, where the skies are generally darker and it doesn't become unbearably hot if you draw the blinds.

LIGHTS SHOULD BE DIMMED, BUT NOT TURNED OFF!

SHOW INTEREST IN THE FILM – no matter how many times you've seen it before!

10. Cultural/Age Differences

Find out what movies your students actually like. A clip from a movie (say "The Matrix") that is genuinely popular with Japanese students will be much more effective than some obscure indie art house feature (say "-----", which is actually an excellent film, but is likely to escape the average SHS 1st grader!) Movies and TV shows are the obvious choices for video lessons and in fact I usually use movies, but music videos might also make an excellent choice (provided your music collection doesn't consist entirely of "-----"...) *INSERT PICTAR OF HAIR METAL BAND ETC INTO POWERPOINT.* (and, erm.. if it does, then I apologize.)

11. Appropriateness

Depending on your home country, you may or may not find that Japanese schools are more permissive in their attitudes towards what is considered "acceptable" for children to be exposed to. For example, I am American and coming from a country where there are metal detectors at the school gates and you need two different signed parental consent forms a week ahead of time to show a video that even so much as *hints* at violence, I am amazed at the relatively wide range of "what flies" in Japanese schools. You can use this to your advantage to show clips from movies with a bit of excitement or action in them in order to keep your students interested and happy. As with all things, however, use a bit of discretion!

Effective Audio Aids

talk about similarities between audio aids and video clips

The most common form of "audio aid" is actually music in the classroom. But this is a topic better dealt with in the seminar "music in the classroom" so what I will be covering today is forms of audio aids that don't necessarily involve music)

--record students, re-arrange the lyrics converted to "rearrange the conversation" → use the "kotowaza on the back" flash cards for true "A/V"ness, play an audio clip and ask questions about the MOOD or inferred situation (as opposed to exact details). -- *JHS STUDENTS – play animal noise/vehicle noise/etc. and they have to guess what word it is!!!*

1. Keep it short

Much as with video clips, one of the keys to effectively using audio aids in the classroom is not to overdue it. Students tend to have a short attention span, and moreover their "foreign language buffer" tends to fill up very quickly – how many times have you asked them a question just to have them catch only the last three or four words? Or, thinking about yourself, in your everyday interactions with Japanese people, haven't you had someone start talking to you and at first you think you're doing okay, but then they keep talking and talking – and before you know it, all you can remember are two or three words!? So make sure your audio aids are short, sweet and to the point. Much like video – if there's something longer you'd like to use, divide it up into bite sized chunks!

2. Use digital media!

Again, like video lessons, try to use digital media for your audio aids whenever possible! This is actually doubly true for audio aids which unlike video tend to require you to repeatedly find a precise spot or track in a limited amount of time. While it's likely that most of the professionally produced audio aids you use will already be in CD form (I don't think they still produce tapes these days!), on the other hand it's tempting to use cassette tapes for the ones you make yourself. I urge you to avoid this temptation whenever possible! These days, it's remarkably easy to make a CD yourself with almost any computer – virtually all computers come with microphone inputs, recording software and CD burners. You'll easily make up any extra effort it might cost you by gaining the ability to precisely and quickly fast forward/rewind and skip to/from tracks using a CD player. *(talk about difficulty in using tapes/accidentally flipping sides/blindly fffwd/rwning)* **TRY TO GET A CD PLAYER WITH A TIME DISPLAY READOUT!

If you want, you don't even need to burn a CD – there's nothing wrong with simply queuing up tracks on your laptop and playing them directly. This method has the added advantage of letting you see the track names, skip between them out of order simply by clicking and also lets you have a visually intuitive method of searching within a track (via the draggable "progress bar" at the bottom). One thing to keep in mind if you're using a laptop is to make sure it's loud enough. Most laptop speakers are woefully underpowered, so it's likely you'll need a set of external speakers for the whole class to hear.

(BRING IN A TAPE/PLAYER TO SHOW SEEK PROBLEMS/NOISE!)

3. Check your equipment ahead of time!

Again, just like with a video lesson, all sorts of things can go wrong in using audio aids. Make sure to devote a few minutes to get into class early and test the equipment. Now granted, it's generally a lot more straightforward to use a CD player than a computer or DVD player, but there are still things that can trip you up – the CD can skip, the machine could be broken, the sound might not be loud enough... The latter in particular is a concern. A few of my classrooms are located right next to the parking lot and two others are located next to a part of the school that is under construction – at the height of the day, all the extraneous noise can really make it difficult for the students to hear anything clearly!

4. Have a backup plan!

In case something does go wrong, you should have some backup ideas. It's a bit easier with most audio aids because usually you can just stand in for the aid (dependent of course on what you were planning on using!) But this means that at the very least you should have a transcript and track order list of your audio aids to cue off of! Of course, you can always just have a completely different lesson plan prepared, but this probably isn't needed.

5. Brief your JTE ahead of time!

Sometimes JTEs – regardless of their language ability – can fail to “catch” words in an audio aid. To avoid any potentially embarrassing situations in class, make sure to give your JTE a clear copy of the transcript ahead of time! Or, if you're using an audio aid which is designed to solicit certain answers from students (for example, playing different animal noises and students have to name the animal), then make sure to let the JTE know what particular answers you're looking for ahead of time. This is a good all around team teaching practice at any rate, so you should already be doing it!

6. Don't outsource yourself!

Audio aids should be just that – an aid. But don't forget that the primary reason you're here in Japan is precisely for your lovely voice and command of the English language! There's no point of whacking in a CD (especially the ones that come with the newer textbooks!) if all it's going to do is say something that you – as a native speaker – can read out loud a dozen times better! Remember, if you're going to use an audio aid to read something you can read, then use it only to reinforce something you've already taught – either in a class where you can't make it (for example if your classes are split 50/50 and JTE teaches half by themselves) or for the students to take home and review.

But to be honest, the best usage of audio aids is for sounds you can't make: things like animal noises, scenes, vehicle noises, etc. One game which I often do with 1st year JHS students to review basic vocabulary is to play tracks of animal noises or vehicle sounds and have them guess the name. Sort of like those books they make these days where parents can read the story to the kids and the kids can press a button to make the appropriate noise for whatever's going on on the page. If you want to scale this up for older students, you can play ambient sounds – city scapes, farm scenes, coffee houses, whatever – with or without conversation and have students describe *the atmosphere of the scene*.

7. It's a two way street

Not all audio aids need to come from you and go to the students. Don't forget that some of the best language training can come in the form of self-feedback for the students. Recording students' voices and letting them hear themselves can be a