

# ELT materials writing: common misconceptions

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# Definition

**materials (n. pl.)**

= things needed for an activity

# Types of ELT materials

- Supplementary classroom materials
- In-house materials
- Published courses

# Common myths 1

- Only experts can write teaching materials

# Who writes ELT materials?

- “All teachers need a grounding in materials writing”
- “The process of materials writing raises almost every issue which is important to learning to teach: the selection and grading of language, awareness of language, knowledge of learning theories, socio-cultural appropriacy; ...”

**David Jolly and Rod Bolitho**

# Common myths - 2

- All experienced teachers can write extended teaching materials

# What experience do writers need?

- substantial classroom experience
- experience of teaching at different levels
- a formal knowledge of language (how it works)
- a feel for the culture of the target group of learners

# What personal qualities?

- creativity/inventiveness
- flexibility
- openness to criticism
- attention to detail
- ability to work in a team
- ability to work alone
- 'see-it-through-ability'



# Common myths - 3

- Materials produced in-house are generally preferable to published materials

# In-house materials

## PROS

- Can be motivating for staff
- Can be team building
- Part of professional development
- Materials focus on students needs
- Materials are culturally appropriate
- Gives prestige to department or institution
- Reduces costs of purchasing books

## CONS

- Time consuming
- Labour intensive
- Insufficient support structure (readers, editors, designers, ..)
- Lack of quality control of content
- Production quality may be poor
- Team working may be problematic
- Hidden costs of using departmental staff

# Common myths - 4

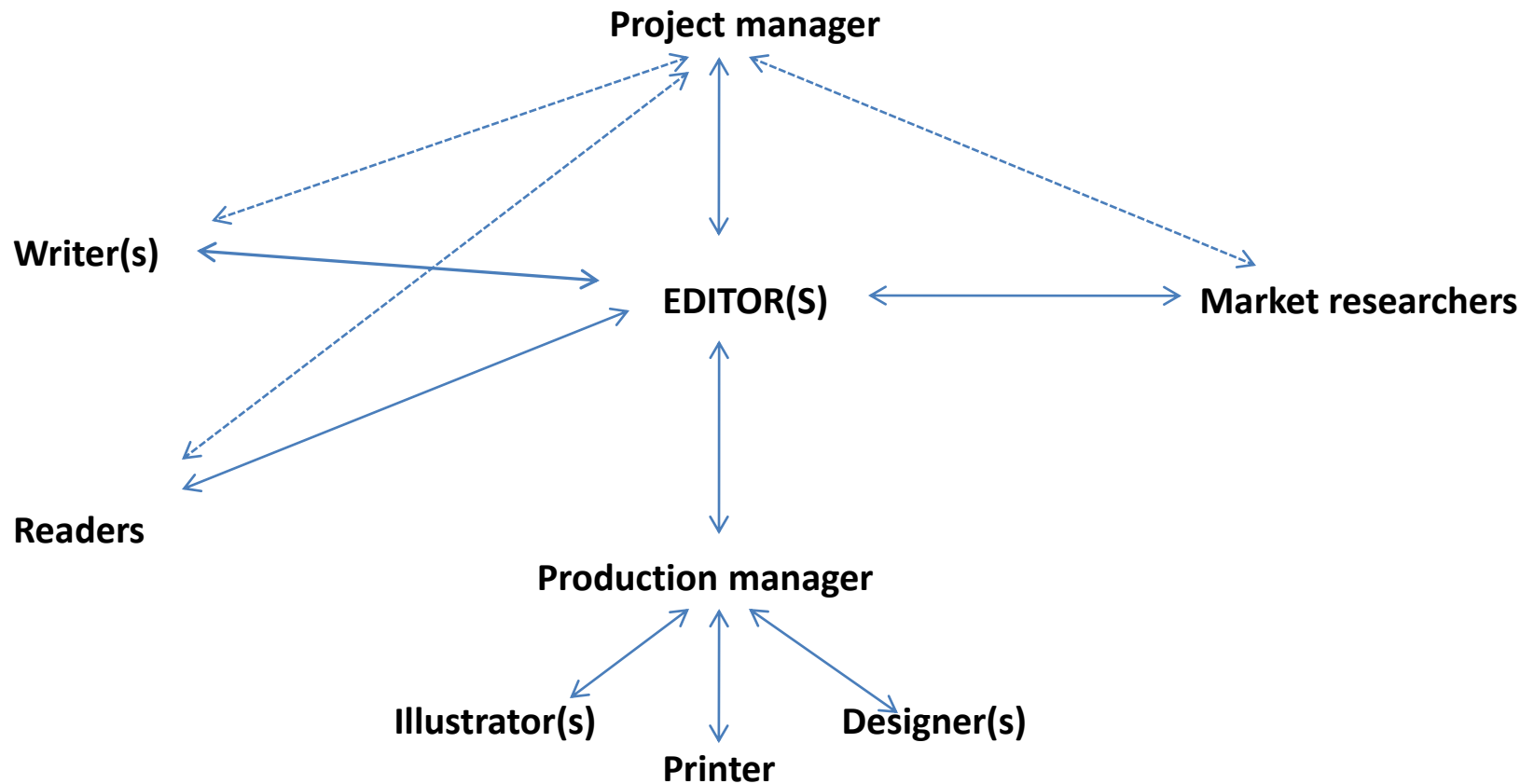
- The writer(s) is (are) the most important part of a writing team



# Who makes up the writing team?

- project manager
- editor(s)
- market researcher(s)
- reader(s)
- illustrator(s)
- production manager
- designer
- writer(s)

# Writing/production team: possible organisational structure



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# Common myths - 5

- The more high-tech the design and production, the better

# Factors in the success of materials

- address the needs of students
- interesting/relevant content
- suitable level
- clearly organised sequence
- visually attractive
- uncluttered (plenty of white space)
- colour (?)

# Common myths - 6

- ELT materials have changed radically over the years.



# Study of current EFL course books

- Language theme
  - presentation
  - analysis
  - practice
- 4 skills work (plus additional language points)

Waters, A. 2007, IATEFL paper, Aberdeen

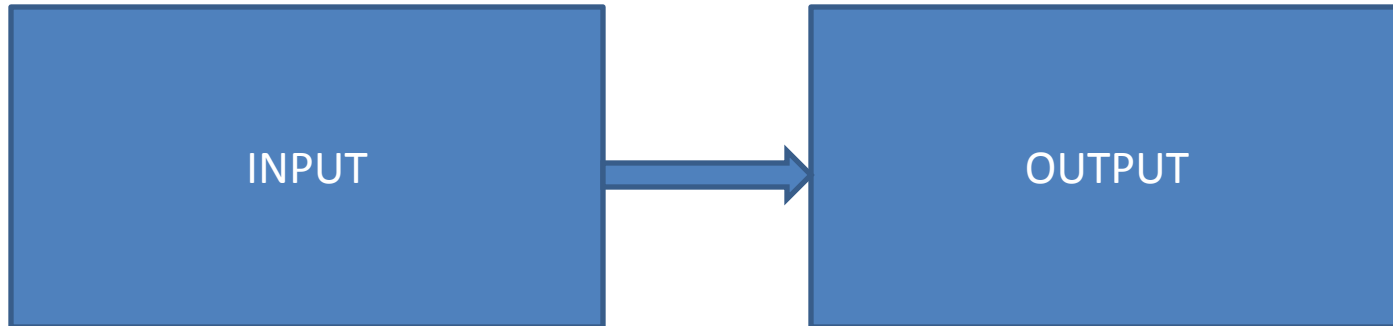
Very similar to ...

PPP

Presentation, Practice, Production

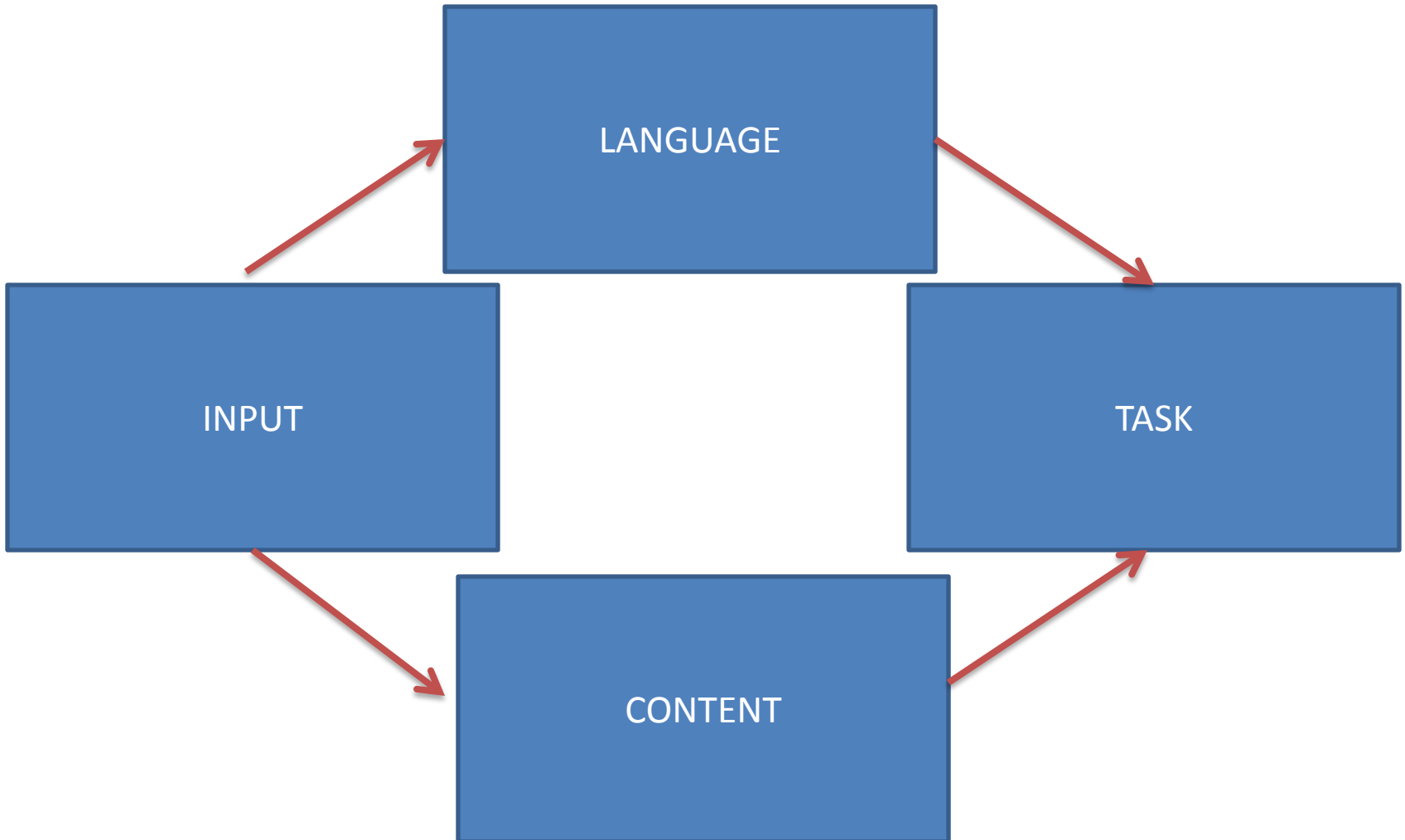
What format should materials take?

# Basic format



# Input-output model

(Hutchinson and Waters )



# Common myths

- Only experts can write teaching materials
- All experienced teachers can write extended teaching materials
- Materials produced in-house are generally preferable to published materials
- The writer(s) is (are) the most important part of a writing team
- ELT materials have changed radically over the years.
- The more high-tech the design and production, the better

# Conclusions for materials writers

- focus on a particular language point or sub-skill – e.g. an area of vocabulary or a reading sub-skill
- model the materials on successful activities and exercises that you have used before
- use a clear, simple layout for your print materials with plenty of white space
- don't waste time on elaborate production techniques
- check your materials carefully, preferably with a colleague, before using them in the classroom
- be prepared to revise, completely rewrite or even ditch your materials

# Summary for ELT material writers

- It is useful for teachers to be involved in supplementary materials writing
- Shared materials need quality control
- Institutions need to weigh carefully the benefits and costs of producing in-house materials



# References

- Harrison, R *Materials Writing* in English Teaching Professional, 53 Nov 2003
- Hutchinson, T and Waters, A *English for Specific Purposes* CUP 1987
- Jolly, D and Bolitho, R *A Framework for Materials Writing* in Tomlinson, B (ed.) *Materials Development in Language Teaching*, CUP 1998
- Waters, A *Materials Design: Bridging the Gap*, Paper given at the IATEFL Conference, Aberdeen April 2007

# Thank you

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