Materials and Methods in ELT

A Teacher's Guide Third Edition

Jo McDonough,
Christopher Shaw,
and Hitomi Masuhara

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Preface to the Third Edition

This third edition of *Materials and Methods in ELT: A Teacher's Guide* has been extensively revised and updated to provide teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) with a contemporary account of major trends in English language teaching (ELT) materials and methodology. It is based on the same rationale as the first two editions in that we hope it will be equally useful to teachers who are following a scheme of study in language teaching methodology or applied linguistics as well as to classroom teachers of EFL around the world who wish to keep abreast of developments in the field. The overall aim of the book is to provide a synthesis between 'principle' and 'practice', by making links between background issues – views of language, psychological bases of language learning – and the practical design of materials and methods.

The first edition of *Materials and Methods in ELT* appeared in 1993 and the second in 2003. During that time we have received extensive feedback from teachers in many parts of the world, and we have tried in this new edition to incorporate that feedback. The revisions for this third edition, undertaken by Hitomi Masuhara working with the original authors, are substantial, though the overall format remains essentially the same, as does the hands-on approach and supportive voice. By the end of the book, we hope that readers will have the necessary skills to understand the most common design approaches for teaching materials, to evaluate critically the principles upon which they are based and to assess their relevance to their own teaching context. It is also our hope that readers will gain some insight into materials and methods within educational frameworks that may differ from their own.

We have divided the book into three parts. The five chapters in the first part relate to the area of materials and syllabus design by looking at the *principles* on which materials and methods are based. This includes a description of

educational frameworks relevant to all ELT practitioners, an analysis of the communicative approach and the wide range of developments that have followed it, a 'pair' of chapters on evaluating and adapting materials, and a completely new chapter on technology in ELT, written specially for this book by Diane Slaouti of the University of Manchester. In part II of the book we attempt to relate to each individual language skill in turn the principles discussed in part I, finishing with a chapter that looks at different ways of achieving effective skills integration in teaching materials. The third and final part of the book focuses largely on different methods of organizing the resources and management of the classroom, including a variety of classroom structures and interaction patterns, in particular group and pairwork and the concept of the individual learner. We then focus increasingly on the teacher by looking at classroom observation techniques and in the final chapter on teachers' roles and possibilities for professional development in the contemporary ELT context.

For this edition, references have been totally updated for all chapters, as have illustrative samples from current and representative teaching materials. There is up-to-date discussion of developments that have taken place since the second edition. The original chapters 2 and 3 have been amalgamated and rewritten, taking a more historical perspective for the analysis of the impact of communicative approaches and exploring current approaches in more detail than before.

Our final goal in writing this book remains that of enabling readers to become better informed about contemporary ELT methods and materials by providing a relatively compact reference package that incorporates practical 'operational' tasks into the text with the desired outcome that readers will have the skills to make informed judgements about their present and future classroom practice.

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Part I

Topics in the Design of Materials and Methods

1

The Framework of Materials and Methods

1.1 Introduction: Setting the Scene

(Graddol (2006: 22), in his study of global trends surrounding English, comments: 'On the one hand, the availability of English as a global language is accelerating globalization. On the other, the globalization is accelerating the use of English'. He refers to a statistical projection of the number of learners: '. . . there could be around 2 billion people simultaneously learning English in the world's schools and colleges and as independent adults. Nearly a third of the world population will all be trying to learn English at the same time' (Graddol, 2006: 101).

As the need intensifies for social, economic and technological communication at a global level, so English language teaching has been diversifying. For example, English teachers may be engaged in teaching

- English as a Foreign Language (EFL) – English taught outside English speaking regions.
- English as a Second Language (ESL) – English taught inside English speaking regions to non-native learners.
- English for Young Learners (EYL) – English taught as an additional language to very young to young learners up to, normally, primary level.
- English for Specific Purposes (ESP) – English taught for specific occupational purposes such as English for medicine and for business.

- English for Academic Purposes (EAP) – English taught to those who wish to study at institutes of higher education.
- Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) – English taught in cross-curricular programmes in which content subjects and language are taught at the same time.

Whichever varieties of English language teaching we are engaged in, teachers of English are members of an established worldwide profession. Wherever we work, we share many assumptions about what we do; we prepare and use teaching materials and classroom methods and techniques based on similar, or at least comparable, principles. Yet, despite this commonality, it is not unusual for teachers to report a sense of isolation from colleagues in other countries, and even in different areas of their own country. Another attitude that is sometimes expressed is that the teaching situation in our country, or school, is unique, with its own special problems and difficulties. There is some justification for these feelings, of course: many teachers work in geographical isolation, and may not have access to channels of professional communication (journals, conferences, in-service training courses); different countries have widely differing educational systems and philosophies, resulting in teachers being subject to different expectations and pressures.

In this chapter we shall take some time to look beyond our individual teaching circumstances to what can be thought of as a professional 'common core'. This has relevance to all teachers, whether we work in a Japanese high school, a Mexican university, a private language school in Spain, a Chinese polytechnic, a Turkish secondary school, a Zairean college – this list could go on indefinitely. We shall argue that the idea of a 'common core' is also useful whether our materials and methods are selected by us or specified by the educational authorities. It is, then, broadly made up of two kinds of factors: firstly, of the various wide-ranging criteria on which decisions about language teaching programmes are based, and secondly, on the pedagogic principles according to which materials and methods are actually designed. We shall take these two kinds of factors together and refer to them as the shared framework.

In what follows, this notion of a 'framework' is set out in a little more detail. We then subdivide it under the two headings of 'context' and 'syllabus', both exploring their general implications and trying to relate them as we do so to our own familiar and specific teaching situation.

1.2   The Framework: Context and Syllabus

In simple terms, the overall goals of a language teaching programme usually derive from an analysis of the reasons why a group of learners in a particular environment needs to learn English: these goals may be stated in general,

educational, or very specific terms. They may, on the one hand, be set out in the large-scale categories of a national language policy with many associated implications for the development of the curriculum. For instance, the aim of English language teaching in Malaysia was earlier stated to be 'to create a society that is able to utilize the language for effective communication as the need arises, and as a key to wider experiences. For those furthering their studies, the skills learned should become an instrument with which they may cope with the necessities of using the language'. The new guidelines for language teaching in Japanese schools include such statements as 'to develop understanding of language and culture through a foreign language . . . to develop a positive attitude towards communication in a foreign language, and a basic practical communication ability in hearing and speaking'. Alternatively, at the other end of the scale, a course may be organized to address a particular learning need for, say, the identifiable purposes of a small group. For instance, a course may be designed 'to meet the needs of learners who need to improve their ability to communicate when socializing, telephoning, making business presentations and taking part in meetings', or 'to help international postgraduate students in English-medium universities develop the writing skills necessary for writing dissertations'.

There is, then, a whole spectrum of possibilities for defining the goals of language teaching, for a country, an age group, a whole school, a class or an individual; and whether for general educational purposes, business, scientific development, cultural appreciation or many other reasons.

1   Is there an explicit statement of the goals of the language programme on which you work? If so, what are its primary aims?
2   If there is not such a statement, try to draft one that represents your own understanding of the goals.

To define what is meant here by 'framework' we start from the view that materials and methods cannot be seen in isolation, but are embedded within a broader professional context. This is represented in figure 1.1, which shows in a very simplified form the typical stages of planning an English language programme.

Whether goals are stated in terms of a national language policy, or in the more specific environment of, say, a particular school or college, the possibilities for actually implementing them will be directly related both to the learners themselves – their needs, characteristics and so on – and to the whole educational setting in which the teaching is to take place. Obviously, as we shall see in our subsequent discussion, goals need to be realistic for each circumstance. There is little use, for example, in planning for a multimedia
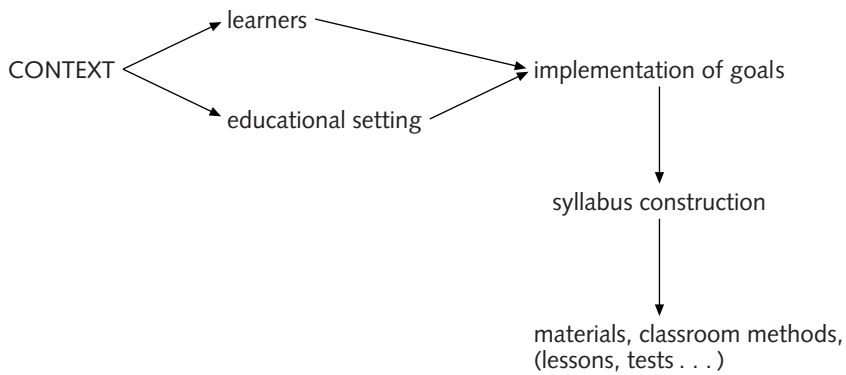
Figure 1.1   The framework of language teaching.

course if appropriate equipment is unavailable or unreliable, or in making too many general assumptions about classroom methodology. The statement of goals, then, related to the learners and conditioned by the setting, leads to the selection of an appropriate type of syllabus content and specification. The broad syllabus outline will in turn have direct implications for the more detailed design and selection of materials and tests, the planning of individual lessons and the management of the classroom itself. Clearly this logical planning sequence is an idealization of what is often a less well-defined procedure, where 'set' materials may linger behind aims that have been reformulated and updated, or conversely where new syllabus types may be ill-matched to existing educational objectives. The logical sequence will nevertheless be used as a reference point for discussion, and as a starting point for the exploration of individual teaching circumstances.

Let us now look at the most important contextual factors involved in planning, and then at the key types of syllabus from which actual courses are derived.

Contextual factors

In the preceding section, we took a broad view of 'context' and included both learners and setting under this heading. Let us examine each of these in turn in a little more detail.

Learners   It is possible to identify a number of important learner characteristics or 'variables' which, as we have suggested, influence planning decisions and the specification of goals. The relative importance of these variables, and their effect on programme design, obviously depend to a certain extent on some of the situational factors to be discussed in the next section. For

example, a pupil's mother tongue may be more, or less, significant depending on whether more than one native language is represented in the classroom, or perhaps on the educational philosophy of that particular environment.

For the moment we can list here the key characteristics of 'the learner', indicating how they might affect planning and noting that they form part of our common frame of reference as language teachers, wherever we work. Some of these are characteristics of whole groups or subgroups of learners; others are individual and less open to generalization. Again, some can be known in advance and incorporated at the initial planning stage, in principle at least. Others are more appropriately assessed in the classroom environment itself, and as such are more obviously susceptible to teacher reaction and influence.

We consider the learner's

- *Age:* this will particularly affect topics chosen and types of learning activity, such as the suitability of games or role play.
- *Interests:* as with age, this may help in the specification of topics and learning activities.
- *Level of proficiency in English:* teachers will wish to know this even where their classes are based on a 'mixed proficiency' principle rather than streamed according to level.
- *Aptitude:* this can most usefully be thought of as a specific talent, in this case for language learning, as something that learners might show themselves to be 'good at', perhaps in contrast to other subjects in a school curriculum. (It can be measured by formal aptitude tests, although they are not very frequently used.) The relationship between aptitude and intelligence is not clear, and is certainly not direct.
- *Mother tongue:* this may affect, for instance, the treatment of errors or the selection of syllabus items – areas of grammar or vocabulary and so on.
- *Academic and educational level:* which help to determine intellectual content, breadth of topic choice or depth to which material may be studied.
- *Attitudes to learning*, to teachers, to the institution, to the target language itself and to its speakers. This is directly related to the following point.
- *Motivation*, at least in so far as it can be anticipated. Obviously a whole range of factors will affect this.
- *Reasons for learning*, if it is possible to state them. With school-age pupils this may be less significant than with many adult learners, where it is often possible to carry out quite a detailed analysis of needs.
- *Preferred learning styles:* which will help in the evaluation of the suitability of different methods, for instance, whether problem-solving activities could be used, or whether pupils are more used to 'rote learning', where material is learned by heart.

- *Personality:* which can affect methodological choices such as a willing acceptance of role play and an interactive classroom environment, or a preference for studying alone, for example.

Many of these factors will affect the learners' needs (for a recent book on needs analysis see Long, 2005), and this issue will recur in the relevant sections of subsequent chapters.

Setting   That aspect of the context that we refer to as *setting* is to be understood here as the whole teaching and learning environment, in a wide sense: it is the factors falling under this heading that will determine whether the aims of a language programme, defined with reference to the learners' needs and characteristics, are actually feasible and realistic. In certain situations, the setting itself may be so significant that it provides the foundation for the specification of aims. This might be the case, for instance, in a country with a single political or religious ideological base, where the education system is primarily an expression of that ideology. In the majority of circumstances, however, the setting is more likely to condition the way in which goals are carried out, and indeed the extent to which they can be.

For most EFL/ESL teachers, therefore, the following factors, in some combination and with varying degrees of significance, will influence course planning, syllabus design, the selection of materials and resources, and the appropriateness of methods:

- *The role of English in the country:* whether it is a regular means of communication or primarily a subject taught in the school curriculum, where, in turn, it may or may not be the first foreign language. This relates to the linguistic environment, and to whether English is spoken outside class in the community or alternatively never heard.
- *The role of English in the school*, and its place in the curriculum.
- *The teachers:* their status, both at national and institutional levels, their training, mother tongue, attitudes to their job, experience, expectations (for a discussion of teachers' needs and wants, see Masuhara, 2011). This topic will be taken up in detail in the final chapter of this book.
- *Management and administration:* who is responsible for what level of decision, particularly which are the control points for employment of staff, budgets, resource allocation and so on. Additionally, the position of teachers in the overall system needs to be understood, as does the nature of the hierarchy in any particular institution.
- *Resources available:* books and paper, audio-visual material (hardware and software for cassette and video), laboratories, computers, reprographic facilities and so on. Design and choice of teaching materials will

be particularly affected by resource availability, as will the capacity to teach effectively across a range of language skills.

- *Support personnel:* administrators, secretaries and technicians, and their specific roles in relation to the teaching staff.
- *The number of pupils* to be taught and the size of classes. Overall numbers may affect the total number of teaching hours available, and the large class problem is a very familiar one in many settings worldwide.
- *Time* available for the programme, both over a working year (longitudinally), and in any one week or term (intensive or extensive). Many teachers would also consider that time of day is a significant factor.
- *Physical environment:* the nature of the building, noise factors, flexibility of tables and chairs, size of room in relation to size of class, heat and cold, and so on.
- *The socio-cultural environment:* this can often determine the suitability of both materials and methods. For example, some textbooks contain topics inappropriate to the setting, and some classroom methods require an unacceptable set of teacher and learner roles.
- *The types of tests used*, and ways in which students are evaluated: assessment procedures may, for example, be formal or informal and subjective. They may also be external, in the form of a public or national examination, or internal to the institution and the course.
- *Procedures (if any) for monitoring and evaluating* the language teaching programme itself. This kind of evaluation may be imposed by 'senior management', or alternatively agreed between teachers as colleagues.

Hedge (2000) covers similar points, classifying them into social, educational, pupil and teacher variables. Nation and Macalister (2010) discuss these factors as environment analysis with three major elements: learners, teachers and situation. Holliday (1994, 2005) is particularly concerned with the need for methodology to be *appropriate* to its socio-cultural context, not inappropriately transplanted from a different – and often more privileged – system. We will discuss this in Chapter 11 and, to a certain degree, Chapter 12.

Teachers are affected, directly and indirectly, by all these variables. Some they may be able to influence or even control: for example, the deployment of resources and materials, or the pacing of work within an overall timescale. Others, of course, arise from decisions taken far removed from a teacher's day-to-day professional life, perhaps at Ministry level, or at an earlier point in the country's educational history. Whatever their source, it is the teacher who is in the 'front line' – attempting to promote learning and fulfil the stated goals against the background of a complex network of interrelated factors. The grim reality described by Gaies and Bowers (1990: 176), with large classes, low motivation, inadequate coursebooks, poorly trained teachers,

lack of resources, heavy workload and the pressure of exams may still be realities in many teaching contexts (e.g. Hu, 2003; Pham, 2007 to name two). The conclusion in Gaies and Bowers (1990) still sounds pertinent that 'by coming to grips not only with new ideas but with the evidence of what happens when they are introduced into the local context, [teachers] equip themselves with the tools for establishing an appropriate methodology that can set realistic national objectives for teacher training and education' (181). We will discuss in more detail in Chapter 14 how changes and innovation affect teachers and how teachers may manage their self-development while seeking support.

Consider the following short case study of a fairly typical teaching environment. Note how the factors associated with the learner and the teaching situation can affect the organization of the language programme, the materials, the teachers and the methodology. For instance, most aspects are determined by decisions taken at some distance from the teacher, although teachers' views may have some effect. Again, the classes are on the whole conditioned by the examination system, but a minority of pupils are able to select classes in line with their own interests, which in turn means that teachers may be less bound by coursebooks and able themselves to be more autonomous in choice of materials and methods. In other words, there is a complex set of factors in operation, and the teacher in the classroom is the focus of a variety of pressures and influences, both direct and indirect.

Teacher X   works in a secondary school, with pupils ranging in age from 12 to 16. She teaches 30 periods a week, two of which are options selected by older pupils according to their interests. Course materials consist in the main of set textbooks graded according to age and proficiency level and focused heavily but not exclusively on accuracy. Materials are written by a Ministry of Education team according to Ministry guidelines, and teachers' opinions are solicited annually by an Area Language Teaching Adviser. It is government policy to revise materials every eight years.

Average class size is 40 pupils. The pressure of the examination system ensures satisfactory attention, though – since there is little opportunity for travel – learners do not readily perceive the relevance of learning materials to their own lives.

The school has a language laboratory and a very small collection of books (mainly stories) written in English. Classrooms are basic but adequate. Very few supplementary English language teaching materials are available, though teachers are encouraged to make their own small-scale resource materials, and to share ideas at local teachers' centres. The school has one computer, so far without Internet access.

This teacher has been to Britain once, on a three-week summer school. She corresponds regularly with an English schoolteacher.

1 Now examine your own teaching environment in a similar way.
   First list the characteristics of your learners and of the teaching
   situation.
2 Then decide which are the more significant of these, and try to plot
   the patterns of cause and effect that they set in motion. For example,
   how are your classroom materials selected? To whom are you
   responsible? What possibilities do you have for innovation, or for
   professional development?
3 Finally, you might like to consider what kinds of changes in your
   teaching situation would have the strongest effect on your role as
   a teacher – a change in your status? Smaller groups? More time?
   The possibilities are many.
4 Discuss your analysis with colleagues, both with those working in
   the same environment and, if possible, with others from different
   backgrounds. Keep a note of your analysis: it will be helpful to refer
   to it again in subsequent chapters.

The syllabus

We can now assume that the goals of an English language programme have
been set out and that the contextual factors affecting its implementation
have been established and understood. The next step in the task of planning
is to select a type of syllabus relevant to the learners for whom it is intended,
appropriate to the situation and which fulfils the aims as closely as
possible.

The 'syllabus' can be seen for our purposes as the overall organizing prin-
ciple for what is to be taught and learned. In other words, it is a general
statement as to the pedagogical arrangement of learning content. Richards
and Rodgers (2001) have proposed a useful framework for the comparison
of language teaching methods that illustrates the place of the syllabus in
programme planning. Their model has three distinct levels, which they term
approach, *design* and *procedure*, and is intended to show the relationship
between the theory and practice of language teaching as an 'interdependent
system'. Briefly, 'approach' is the most general level, and refers to the views
and beliefs – or theories – of language and language learning on which plan-
ning is based. The most obvious example here is a view of language described
as a set of grammatical structures. The next level, 'design', is where the prin-
ciples of the first level are converted into the more practical aspects of syl-
labuses and instructional materials. It is here that decisions are taken about
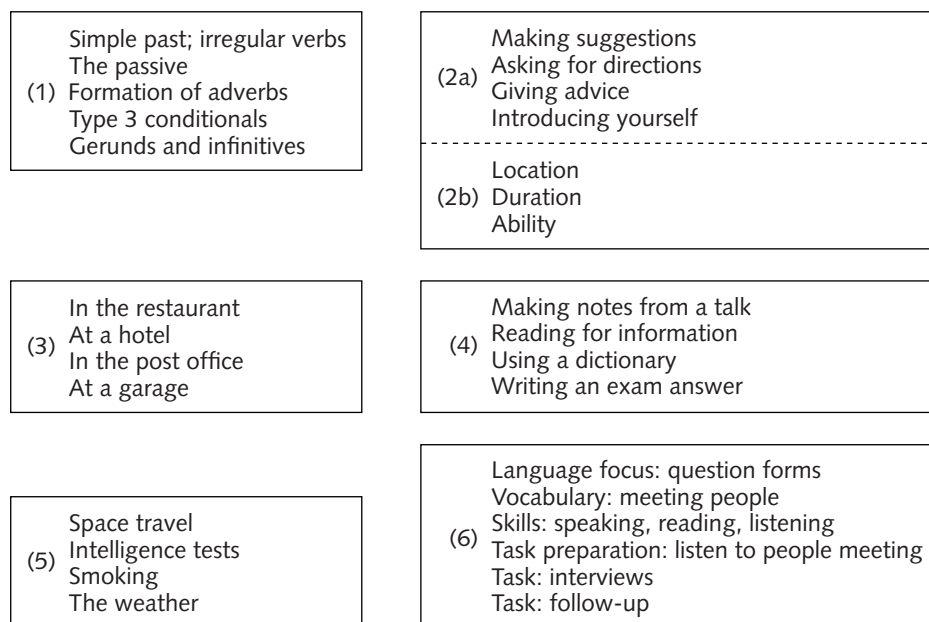the arrangement of content to be taught and learnt, the choice of topics,

language items to be included in the programme and so on. Finally, 'procedure' refers to techniques and the management of the classroom itself.

The English language teaching profession nowadays has available a range of different types of syllabus from which a choice will be made for a specific situation. So however diverse our teaching contexts, our courses will be based on one, or a combination of, these principles of organization. Although syllabuses typically are written and published documents, their circulation is often restricted to the particular situation for which they have been drawn up. Therefore, one of the simplest ways of surveying the types of syllabus available is to examine the contents pages of published English language teaching textbooks, because they reveal the underlying principles and assumptions on which the writers have based their material. At one and the same time, they tell us something both about the approach and the design adopted, thus bringing together principle and practice in a directly observable way.

This is not a book about syllabus design as such, and it will not be necessary or appropriate to analyse each syllabus type in depth here. References to more detailed discussion are given at the end of the chapter, and the next chapters will examine the major areas of current debate. Let us simply try to identify the key principles of syllabus organization by examining the types of contents page most often found in the materials we use, because these distinctions will be the foundation for our discussion of 'design and procedure' in the remainder of the book.

> Look at the coursebook(s) that you use most frequently. With which of our samples in figure 1.2 does the table of contents in your own material compare most closely?

The first of these obviously is organized according to a list of grammatical structures and is one that will readily be recognized by most English language teachers. The second is based on the communicative and interpersonal uses to which language is put and, in contrast to the formal structural system of the first type, highlights what people do through language. It is normally referred to as a 'functional' syllabus. This design principle is often found together with the other list of items in the same box: they are technically called 'notions', a term used to describe the rather general and abstract categories a language is able to express, such as concepts of time and place. For convenience – and in line with common practice – they will be placed together here, and the syllabus as a whole designated 'functional-notional'. The most important distinctions between this on the one hand and the so-called structural syllabus on the other will be taken up in the next chapter.

(1) Simple past; irregular verbs The passive Formation of adverbs Type 3 conditionals Gerunds and infinitives	(2a) Making suggestions Asking for directions Giving advice Introducing yourself --- (2b) Location Duration Ability
(3) In the restaurant At a hotel In the post office At a garage	(4) Making notes from a talk Reading for information Using a dictionary Writing an exam answer
(5) Space travel Intelligence tests Smoking The weather	(6) Language focus: question forms Vocabulary: meeting people Skills: speaking, reading, listening Task preparation: listen to people meeting Task: interviews Task: follow-up

Figure 1.2 Principles of syllabus organization. (Adapted from *Cutting Edge* by Cunningham and Moor, 1999.)

The third sample presents a set of everyday situations or 'settings'. The fourth focuses on language skills, and is concerned with what learners do as speakers, listeners, readers, writers. The fifth uses topics or themes as its starting point. The sixth invokes the concept of task, discussed in Chapter 2.

We can now identify six broad types of syllabus:

1 grammatical or structural
2 functional-notional
3 situational
4 skills-based
5 topic-based
6 task-based

It is, of course, unusual to find just one of these as the only organizing principle, in isolation from others, and before leaving this discussion of syllabus types, two final explanatory points must briefly be made.

First, most syllabuses are based on a combination of two or more of the types we have illustrated. Some, like this one, for example, may have a 'primary' and a 'secondary' organizing principle: