

THE OHP: REVIEWING TECHNIQUES

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It matters not whether the overhead projector is presented in a book, a lecture, or an article, it somehow emerges with flying colors as THE TOOL to be used in a classroom; THE AID to accompany lessons; and THE DEVICE to brighten foreign language classes. Granted! It is versatile, easy to handle, and fun to use. However, after all its advantages are enumerated by different authors, a word of caution is invariably included, namely the danger of over-saturation.

In years of observing colleagues as well as trainees in teacher training programs. I have never encountered the problem of over-saturation. On the contrary, I honestly believe that despite its innumerable advantages, the OHP is neither sufficiently used nor satisfactorily exploited. And this is true in institutions where the projector is part of the equipment -not where teachers barely have essentials like a blackboard and chalk. Consequently, the purpose of this article is to encourage ESL/ EFL teachers to use the projector more often by resorting to different techniques to produce varied and easy to make transparencies.

To design OHP activities, it is important to have a basic kit which - in this particular case - is very reduced: transparencies and felt-point pens. All other materials are probably at hand or easily accessible and can be incorporated as the needs arise.

The transparencies are absolutely indispensable. Although they are expensive (What isn't nowadays?), they can be erased and used over and over again. In an emergency, however, one can always resort to other transparent materials: plastic envelopes, two pieces of transparent adhesive paper stuck together, or even the

whiter parts of old X-rays. Although these materials are suggested, it is better to avoid them as they might burn with the heat of the projector if one is not careful.

The OHP felt-point pens are not absolutely indispensable but certainly very convenient. Common ordinary pens do not make even lines and the transparencies look sloppy. Other materials can be used instead, which we shall see further on. The special pens -either 'permanent' (but erasable with alcohol) or 'soluble' (washable with water)- are invaluable tools in the hands of any teacher. With them an activity can be designed very quickly, and attractive color combinations can easily be achieved. In reference to colors, a practical tip is in order at this point. When several colors are used, to avoid smearing -particularly where black lines are involved- turn the transparency over and color on the reverse side without any danger of messing it up.

The basic techniques for using and designing transparencies are few, but with some ingenuity each one can be developed into numerous varieties.

The most obvious and common technique is writing. Anything can be written on a transparency, and it can be done either beforehand or at the moment the class is being given. But like the chalkboard, the planning has to be done ahead of time so the layout does not cause students unwarranted difficulties. Fig.1 is an example of a transparency used in a class where the main parts of a friendly letter were being taught.

The material could have been typewritten and photocopied, but in this particular case it was not. Anything can be photocopied on a transparency, too. All that has to be done is to prepare whatever activity one has in mind on a sheet of paper and take it to a specialized shop to have it photocopied (or this can be done in your own institution if the machine is available); they usually provide the transparency for an additional fee. Since photocopied transparencies cannot be erased, it is advisable to select very carefully what should be kept 'forever and ever'.

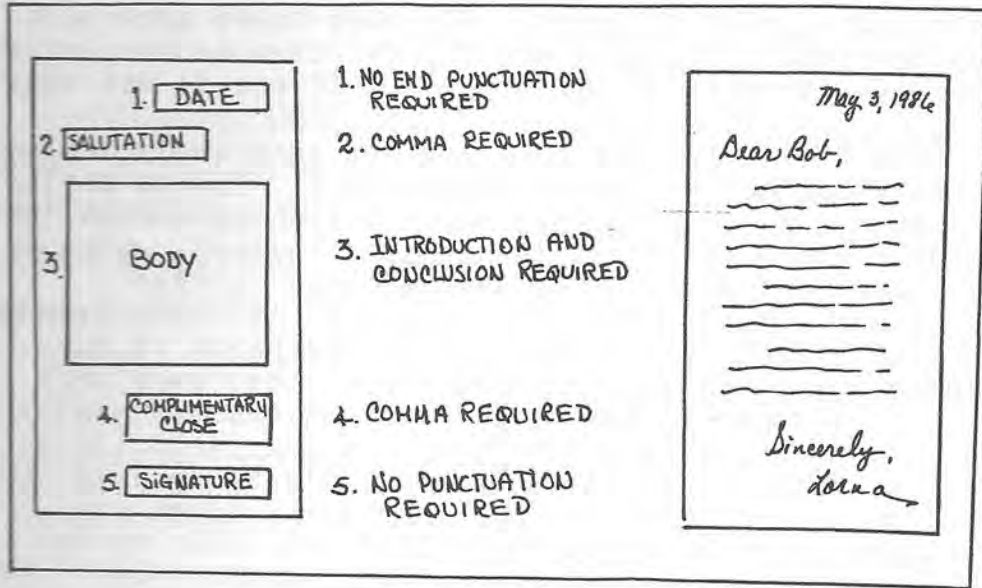


Fig. 1

A second technique is drawing. If you are an artist, you have tremendous possibilities at your fingertips; activities are waiting to be created. I have never been able to draw anything in my life; it is one of my frustrations as a teacher. However, this shortcoming has never stopped me from designing materials of all sorts. With the transparencies not only can I trace very easily



Fig. 2

but also enlarge any drawing. Posters can be prepared by using a third technique: enlarging. Let us assume that you are preparing an activity that has to do with the Olympic Games, and the only drawings you have are like the one shown in Fig. 2. As it is evident, the cut-out obviously is quite small. No problem. First trace the figure on a transparency; then project it on a wall where a posterboard (or another transparency) is hung; move the OHP back and forth until you get the size you want; and trace to your heart's

content. When you finish tracing, color the drawings and make as many posters (or transparencies) as you want.

A fourth technique is using shadows. In general no pens are needed to design a variety of transparencies. The drawing of a section of the London underground shown in Fig.3 is an example of one.

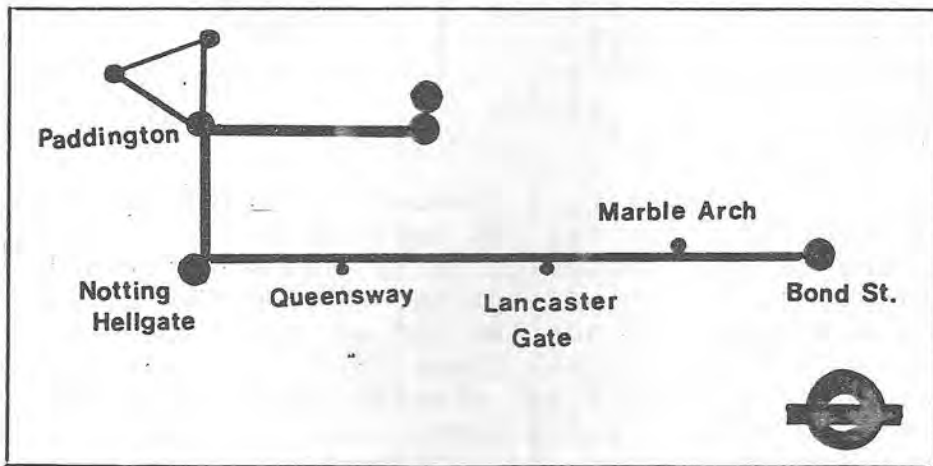


Fig. 3

No pen was used in this particular case. The lines were done by cutting narrow strips of masking tape; the stations and the symbol of the underground, with stickers; and the lettering, with transfer letters. In other words, everything was stuck on.

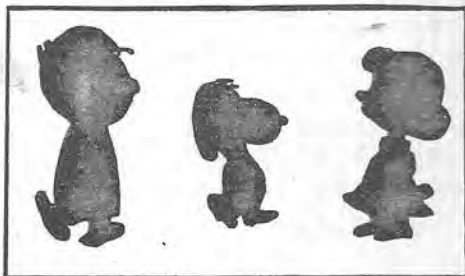


Fig.4

Other types of shadows are the ones shown in Fig.4. If you were to use it, would there be any doubt in the minds of your students as to the identity of the characters? The only thing that has to be

done is cut the original figures and glue them on the transparency. The projected shadows from the original transparency look exactly like the ones in the example.

The range of possibilities in using silhouettes is infinite- animals, household objects, occupations... (Fig.5)



Fig. 5

There is, however, a drawback in doing these type of silhouettes: you may not have the patience to cut out every detail. Although it is a very successful technique, it is time-consuming, and the chore could become wearisome. Since the OHP was not meant to produce any frustrations, there is an alternative. Go to any supermarket and get plastic toys. They come in many sizes, colors, and shapes. Even though the colors are not important here, the silhouettes that are projected on the screen are incredibly perfect. With those tools at hand, who needs to draw or cut?

The other two techniques- sequencing and moving- hardly need any explanation. Sequencing can be done in a number of ways. One way is to reveal information bit by bit by overlaying. That is, by placing one transparency on top of another thus completing an activity by stages (Fig. 6).



Fig.6

Other ways are by moving a sheet of paper (Fig.7), or by removing masks (Fig. 8) and flaps (Fig. 9).

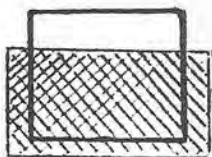


Fig. 7

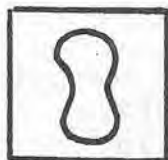


Fig. 8



Fig. 9

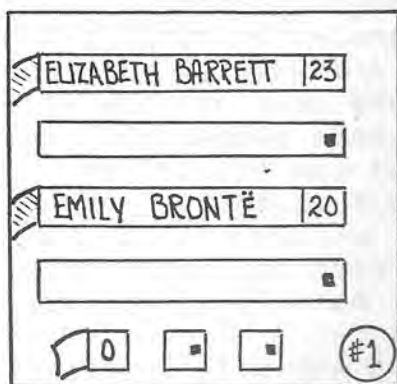


Fig. 10

If you are familiar with NBC's Family Feud, a similar activity can be designed for a class by using the OHP instead of the electronic board. The answers are placed on a transparency hidden under flaps and are revealed when the students— who are divided in two teams— give the right answers (Fig. 10). In a literature class, for example, the first question could be: "Name a Victorian woman writer". As the students respond with the

correct answers, they are disclosed by removing the flaps, and the team gets the points previously assigned to each answer. The game continues until all the possibilities are completed. If an answer is wrong, however, the flaps at the bottom of the transparency contain zeros. The team that gets more points without accumulating the three zeros wins the game.

The last technique is moving. For special effects a transparency can have movement. One manner of moving them is by preparing a type of filmstrip where a series of transparencies are hinged together to facilitate sliding (Fig.11). By

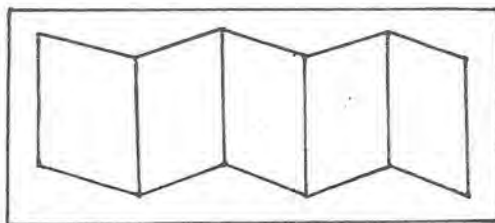


Fig. 11

placing a 'screen' (Fig.12) on the OHP, a whole story can be sequenced by sliding the transparencies under it. Quino's cartoons photocopied, cut, and arranged in a strip are very effective for an activity to elicit oral production.

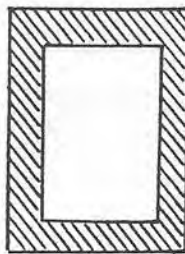


Fig. 12

Another way of moving is through a memory game. Display a number of small transparencies on the projector; let the students examine them for a minute or so; turn off the OHP; rearrange the order and take off one of the drawings; turn the light on, and have students guess which one is missing. Memory games can be used to review vocabulary words as well as functions.

In closing I would like to stress the importance of becoming involved in the design of materials. It is merely a matter of getting started for I am convinced that once you do, you will enjoy it and will be hooked forever. There is a potential in every person, and there is no telling what original creations each one of you will achieve!