

## Commercial Break – using TV commercials as supplementary materials in the listening class

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There are several answers to the obvious question, “Why use video?” As teachers already know, video is one of the most versatile resources that we have available for use in the classroom. The range of activities that can be done using video is huge but it is particularly suitable for the listening class since it allows the decontextualized language that students often hear on audio cassette tapes to be brought to life; video can present language in a more comprehensive way than any other teaching medium. It is also highly motivational, provided it is not simply used as a surrogate audiotape. We live in a world that is dominated by visual images and messages of all kinds. People, both students and teachers, naturally respond to these images. It follows too that video is a great way to facilitate both teacher–student and student–student communication in the classroom. In addition to contextualizing spoken English, video also allows students to observe the importance that non–verbal messages play in communication, and furthermore it facili-

tates cross–cultural comparison, not only of non–verbal communication but also of the whole range of cultural behavior and artefacts.

The second, and related, question is, “Why use TV commercials?” Again, there are several good reasons for using commercials in the classroom. The first is that they are short—30 seconds to one minute being the typical length. This is not enough time for students to lose their concentration, which they naturally do when presented with longer passages for comprehension. Secondly, it is the nature of the medium for commercials to be interesting and often memorable – they are designed to get and hold people’s attention. Thirdly, tasks can be designed to fit any type of commercial. For many different reasons foreign TV commercials are often not accessible to students. They may be lacking the cultural background, the commercial may include an element of humour, or the language may simply be beyond the level of the students. However,

by varying the task we can adapt almost any commercial to any level.

### Short Activities for Active Viewing.

Many traditional language activities can also be used with TV commercials. For example, comprehension check / guided listening using true or false questions, dictation, etc. Other activities include :

#### Activity 1

This activity is for vocabulary development and involves teaching students about collocations. The commercial is for a car magazine. Students have a worksheet with some collocations already filled in. They have to watch the commercial and write down more collocations. (see Figure 1) \*

#### Activity 2

The following commercial utilizes a description of a process ; in this case the process is cooking scrambled eggs with smoked salmon. It could be exploited as a resource in many possible ways, and the following are some examples.

#### (a) Listening for detail

Numbers : watch the commercial and write down the numbers that you hear.

You need \_\_\_\_\_ eggs.

This recipe is for \_\_\_\_\_ people.  
etc.

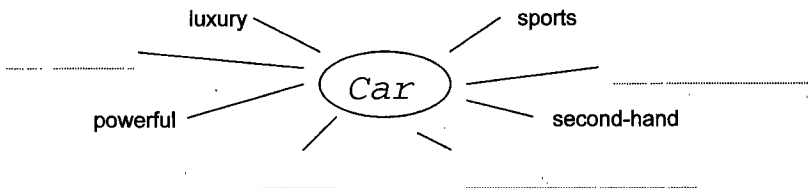
#### (b) Vocabulary Development

The following words are all used in cooking. Check  the words that you hear in the commercial, then match with the correct definition.

- |                          |       |   |
|--------------------------|-------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | add   | mix something inside a container by moving a spoon around in it with circular motions |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | boil  | stir air into something very quickly  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | whisk | give people food or drink   |
|                          | etc.  |   |

(Figure 1)

For example :



(c) Ordering

As you watch the commercial put the different parts of the recipe into the correct order by writing a number (1,2,3,4, etc...) in the box next to the sentence.

- Serve immediately with Sainbury's toasted bagels and garnish with chopped chives
  - When hot, add the eggs. Stir until they begin to get firm
  - Add 2 tablespoons of single cream and leave for 10 minutes
- etc.

### Activity 3

This is one of my favorite activities – it's called "What's the product?"

Select a TV commercial that does not give the identity of the product or service concerned until the end (or near the end). Tell the students that you are going to play part of a TV commercial. Their task is to decide on the product or service being advertised. Students discuss in small groups and the teacher elicits ideas. With more advanced students ask why...

### Activity 4

This is very similar to Activity 3, however in this case you should choose a commercial that includes a lot of interest-

ing sounds. Arrange the monitor so that students cannot see the screen. Play the commercial and ask students to speculate on the situation, or what product is being advertised.

### Activity 5

This activity utilizes silent viewing.

Give students the following questions, or variations on :

*Where is this person?*

*Who is he?*

*What is happening?*

*What is he saying?*

### Activity 6

Many TV commercials include a catchphrase of some kind. In this simple activity students are given a list of catchphrases and products and asked to match them. They then watch the video to confirm their answers.

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Resources :

"Video" –Richard Cooper, Mike Lavery, and Mario Rinbolucru (OUP, 1991)

"Video in action" –Susan Stempleski and Barry Tomalin (Prentice Hall, 1990)

"New Ways in Teaching Listening"  
–edited by David Numan and Lindsay Miller (TESOL, 1995)