

# Needs Assessment for Course or Curriculum Design

In this session, we will:

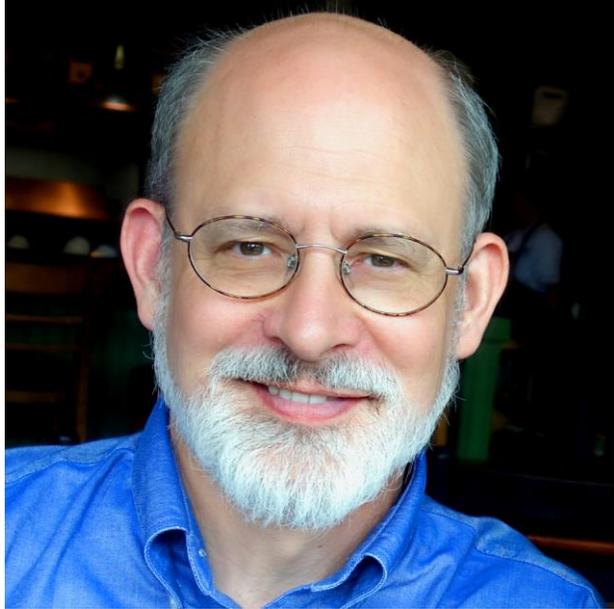
- examine the needs assessment process by reviewing several methods, techniques, and options for gathering data about student needs
- consider how to use that information for course design, examining some basic course development steps and choices
- briefly explore how needs assessment principles for course design can translate to the larger task of curriculum development
- gain a clear sense of design choices and decision points to consider as we work to ensure that courses and curricula meet student needs



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE



# Joe McVeigh



Joe lives in Vermont in the northeastern United States. He has taught ESL students and trained teachers at colleges and universities in the United States and overseas, and he is the author of several textbooks for students.

Joe serves on the Board of Directors of the TESOL International Association, and he also works as a consultant, advising schools on English language needs and giving professional development workshops and conference talks. He has worked as an English Language Specialist for the U.S. Department of State in Oman, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Spain, Cambodia, and Vietnam.



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# Needs Assessment for Course or Curriculum Design

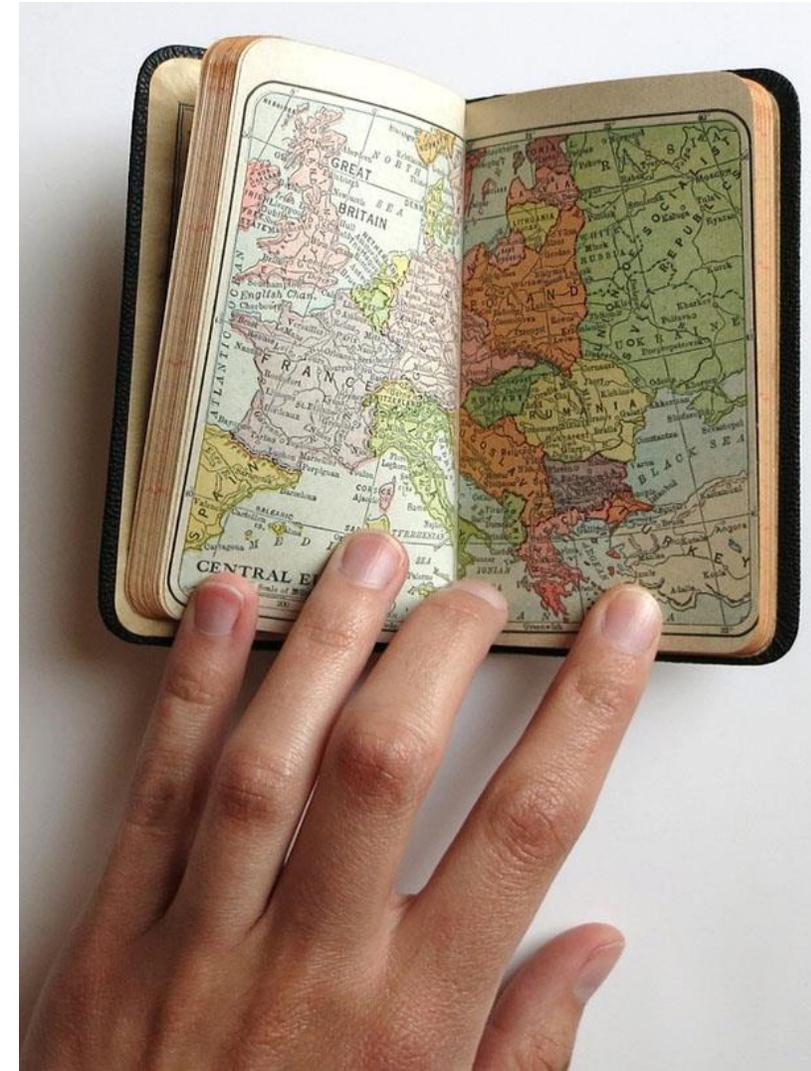


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# Road map

- What is needs assessment?
- How can we gather information?
- How can we use the information to design courses?
- How does needs assessment support curriculum design or tailoring an existing course?



# Contexts



Remember that other participants might be teaching in situations that are different than yours:

- Primary school, secondary school, adults
- General English, specialized English
- Varying degrees of support and technology
- Teacher training and development programs

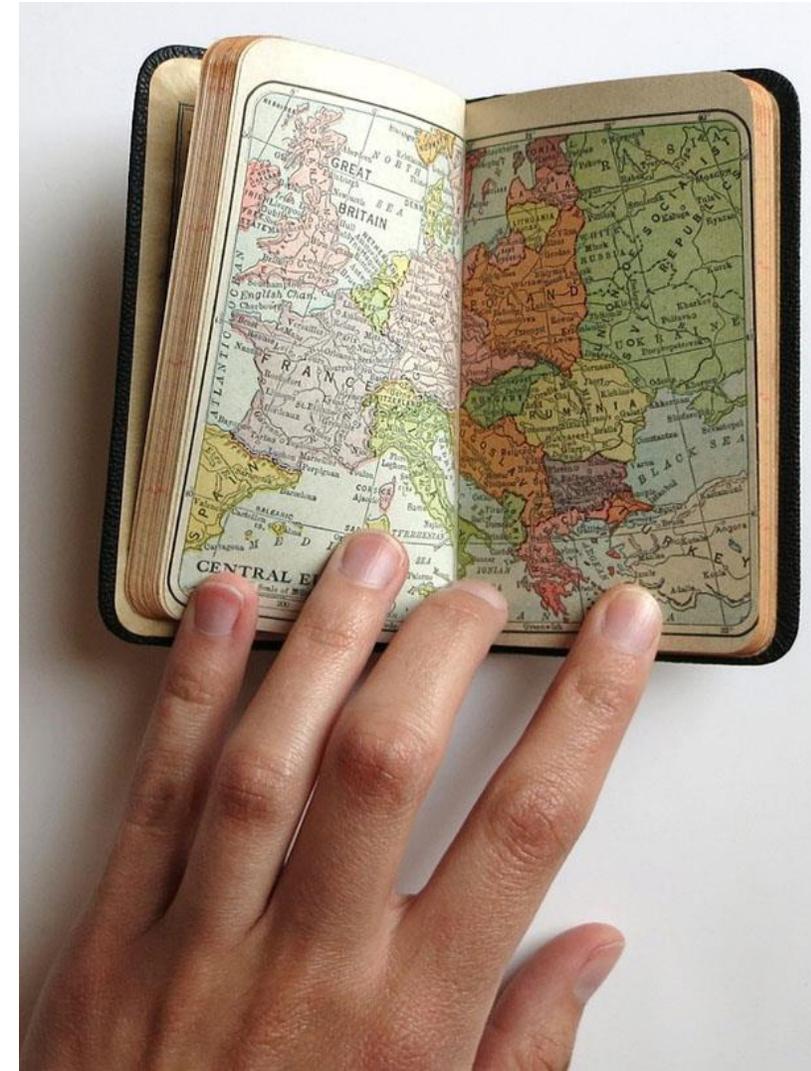
# What's your situation?



- A. You teach your own class, and the course, syllabus, and materials are already selected for you
- B. You teach your own class, but you get to choose the materials and some of the course content
- C. You are responsible for developing and designing a new course
- D. You are responsible for developing and designing the curriculum for an entire school or program

# Road map

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# What is needs assessment?



“...The systematic collection and analysis of all subjective and objective information necessary to define and validate defensible curriculum purposes that satisfy the language learning requirements of students within the context of particular institutions that influence the learning and teaching situation.”

(H. D. Brown, 1995)

# What is needs assessment?

Imagine you need to lead a group of people on a hike to climb a mountain.

What would you want to know in advance to help plan the trip?

# What to know before leading a hike

How far do we have to go?

How much time do we have to get there?

What level of experience do the hikers have?

Does everyone have the needed equipment?

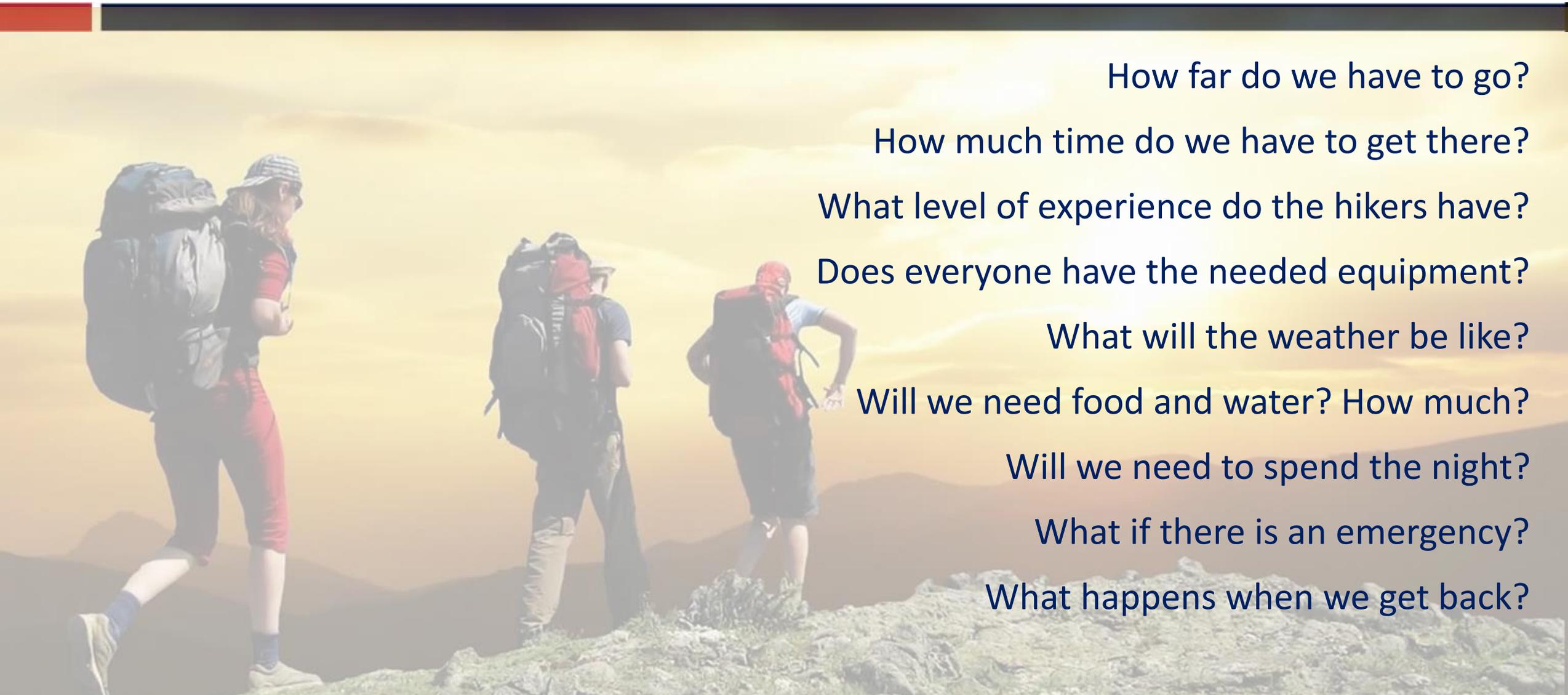
What will the weather be like?

Will we need food and water? How much?

Will we need to spend the night?

What if there is an emergency?

What happens when we get back?



# What is needs assessment?

Imagine that you are going to design and develop a new course.

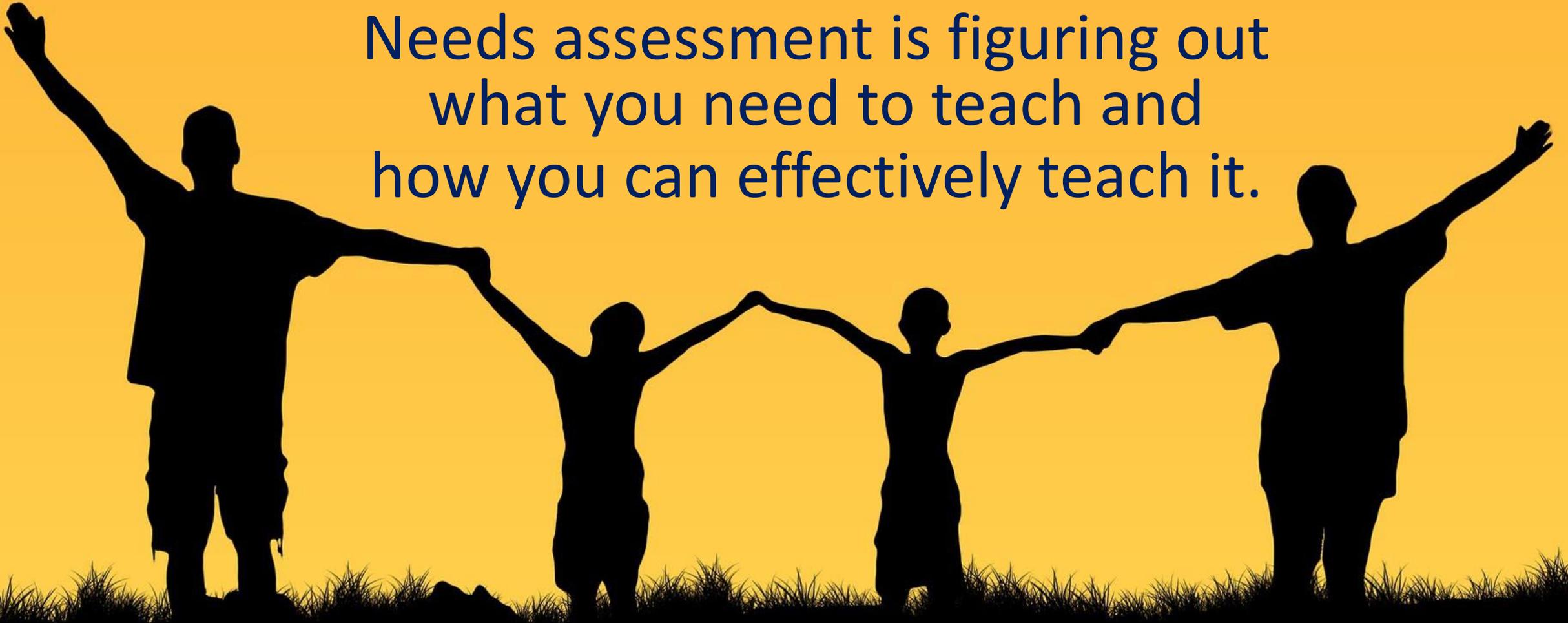
What would you want to know in advance to help you develop the course?

# What to know before designing a course

- Who are the students? What is their current English level?
- How much time do we have for the course?
- What language skills do the students need by the end of the course?
- What is the educational context like?
- Will we need new materials?
- Who will design the new course?
- What is the assessment process?
- What are the constraints on the process?

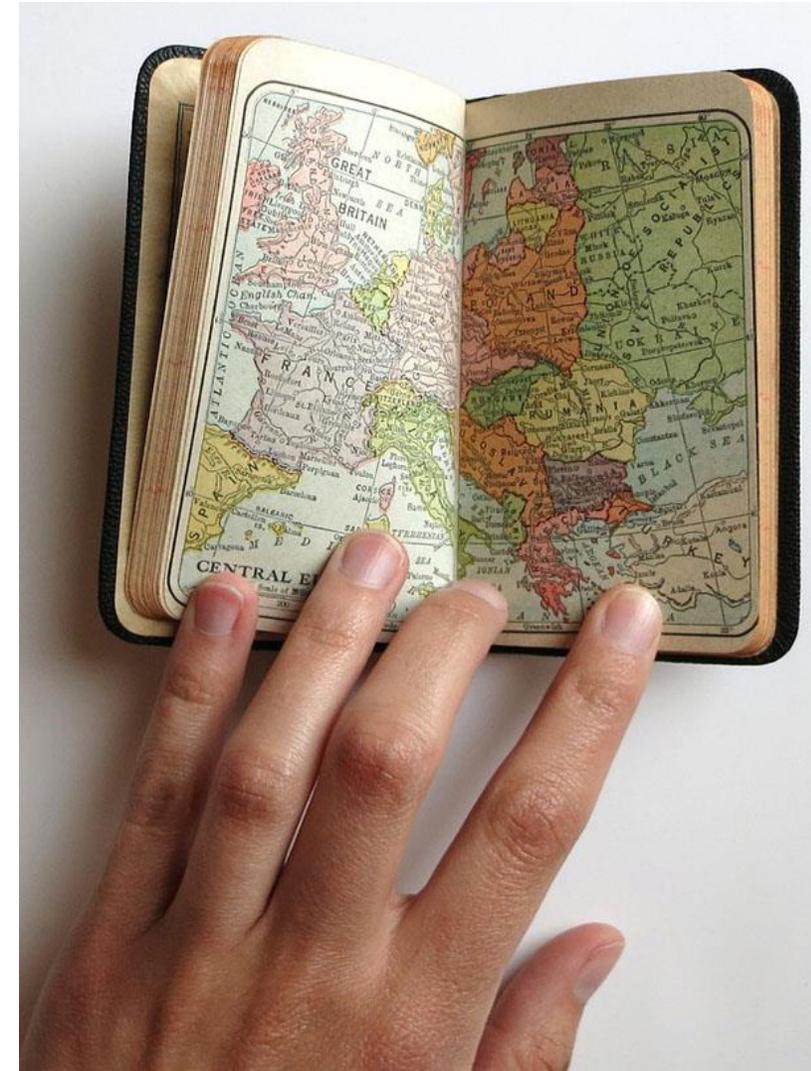
# What is needs assessment?

Needs assessment is figuring out what you need to teach and how you can effectively teach it.



# Road map

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# The needs assessment process

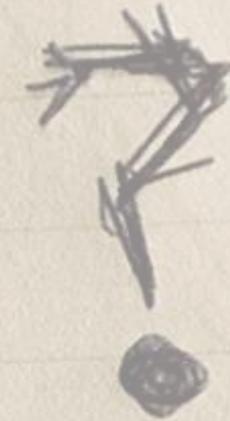
(adapted from Graves, 2000)

- Involve the right people
- Pose the right questions
- Use the right instruments
- Analyze and interpret the data
- Construct the course



# Involving the right people

Who are some of the people that you might want to involve in a needs assessment activity?



# Involving the right people

The learners	The needs analysts	The audience	Resource groups
The people who will be taking the course or training	The people responsible for conducting the needs analysis	The people who will need to act upon the analysis or make decisions	The people who can provide information about learners and their needs
students	teachers, course designers, consultants, materials writers	teachers, supervisors, managers, administrators	parents, financial sponsors, employers, future teachers, clients

# A real-life example

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ESP: English for Specific Purposes

A telephone calling center



# Involving the right people: example

Telephone calling center



The learners	The needs analysts	The audience	Resource Groups
call center trainees	internal and external consultants, training staff	senior executives, training department, consultants, materials development team	managers and supervisors, trainers, current employees, clients, human resources personnel

# The needs assessment process

- Involve the right people
- Pose the right questions
- Use the right instruments
- Analyze and interpret the data
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# Pose the right questions:

## Outcomes

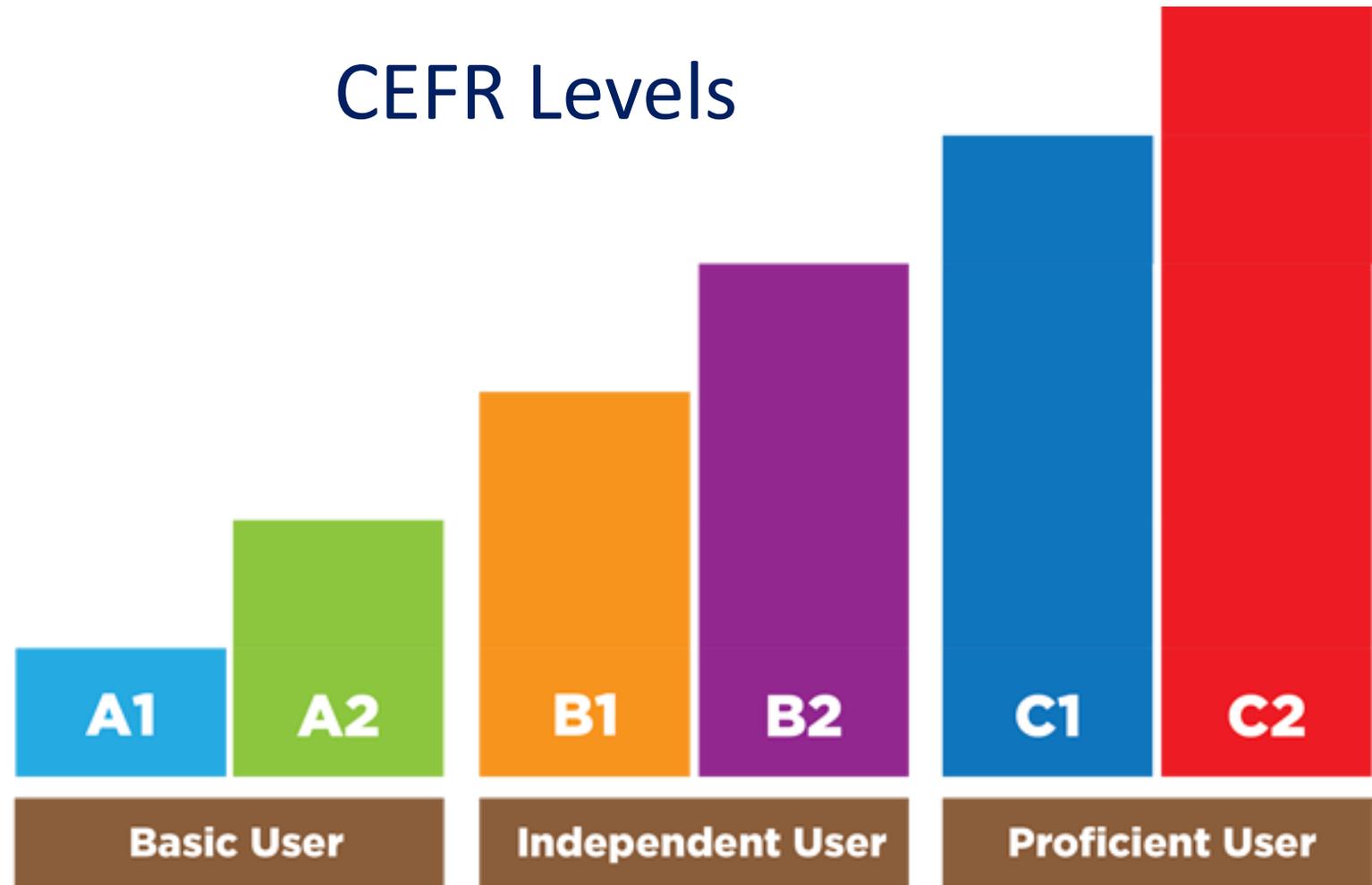
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- What is the desired outcome of the course or training?
- What do the students or trainees need to be able to do at the conclusion of the course?
- What kinds of language skills do they need?
  - Setting?
  - Language functions?

# Pose the right questions:

## Current ability

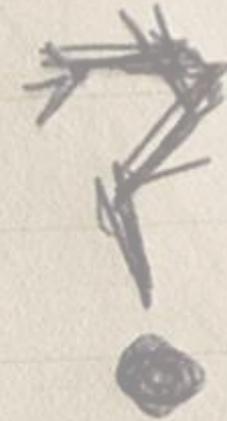
What is the current language level of students who will enter the course?



# Pose the right questions: Resources and constraints

If you wanted to create a workshop series for local teachers, what resources could you use?

What would be the constraints?  
(potential problems or restrictions)



# Pose the right questions:

## Resources and constraints

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- What resources are available to make this happen?
  - Space
  - People
  - Money
  - Technology
- What are the constraints?
  - Money
  - Time
  - Human resources and personnel
  - Funds for materials/curriculum development

# Pose the right questions:

Under the surface

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- Is the problem being presented to you really the problem?
- Or is the real problem something else, or in addition?

# Pose the right questions:

## Example

### Telephone calling center

<b>The “presenting problem”</b>	<b>It is a matter of pronunciation.</b>
The needs assessment showed:	Pronunciation <u>is</u> a big problem. But also: grammar, popular expressions, cultural awareness, and appropriate levels of politeness



So ... It is not enough just to ask questions about pronunciation

# Example questions



- What is the current level of students' English and where do they need to go?
- What aspects of their language need improvement?
- How much teaching time is available before they need to be at the next level?
- What types of language do students need to use in their education/work?
- How much experience do the teachers have?
- What type of materials would be most helpful?

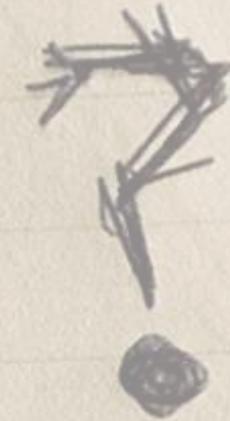
# The needs assessment process

- Involve the right people
- Pose the right questions
- **Use the right instruments**
- Analyze and interpret the data
- Construct the course



# Use the right instruments

What instruments, methods, or techniques can you use to answer key questions related to your needs assessment?



# Use the right instruments

- Existing information
- Tests
- Interviews
- Focus groups
- Questionnaires
- Observations
- Discourse analysis



# Interviews and focus groups

- Make the participants feel comfortable
- Explain the purpose of the needs assessment
- Allow the participants to do most of the talking
- Clarify what you have heard by repeating it and by restating ideas
- In a group, try to get everyone to participate
- Probe more deeply if you need additional information
- Ask an assistant to take notes
- Explain what you will do with the results of the interview



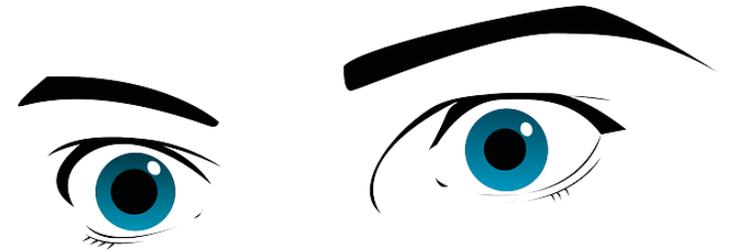
# Questionnaires

- Keep questions carefully focused
- Don't make the questionnaire too long
- Think about how you will collect and use the information
- Is it best if the questionnaire is anonymous?



# Observations

- Observe current or existing classes
- Observe classes or workplaces where the students will go after the class  
(What will they need to be able to do?)
- Be a “fly on the wall”



# Observations: example

## Telephone calling center

<b>Observation method: listening in on live telephone calls</b>	Presenting problem: It is a matter of pronunciation.
<b>The observations showed:</b>	Calling center agents needed better skills at conveying non-verbal behavior through stress and intonation.

So, you can find useful information by watching people in action.



# Discourse analysis

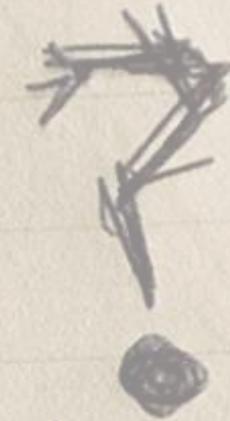


- Collect language samples that students will need to understand or produce
  - Can be written or spoken (recorded)
- Look carefully at the language that is used. What do you notice about it?
  - Content, grammar, vocabulary, specialized language

# Discourse analysis

Listen carefully to the following conversation.

What do you notice about the language?  
Try to go beyond the surface.



# Discourse analysis example

**AGENT:** So it should be coming tomorrow or...tomorrow.

**CUSTOMER:** Tomorrow?

**AGENT:** Right.

**CUSTOMER:** OK. Is there a tracking number or anything, so we can track it?

**AGENT:** Sure, um, one second please.

**CUSTOMER:** Sure.

**AGENT:** OK. You ready?

**CUSTOMER:** Yup.



# Discourse analysis example

**AGENT:** Your tracking number is 11 – It’s a long number – ha ha ha

**CUSTOMER:** OK

**AGENT:** I’ll start over uh huh ...1101

**CUSTOMER:** OK

**AGENT:** 9008

**CUSTOMER:** Nine -- No, let me just ask you something, the “oh-oh”  
... are those zeros or ... ?

**AGENT:** Zeros.

**CUSTOMER:** Zeros. OK, 008

**AGENT:** 8223



# Discourse analysis example

**CUSTOMER:** Wait a minute, now there's two 8s in a row?

**AGENT:** Right, two 8s in a row.

**CUSTOMER:** 8223

**AGENT:** 121

**CUSTOMER:** 121

**AGENT:** 80

**CUSTOMER:** 80

**AGENT:** 59

**CUSTOMER:** 59



# Discourse analysis example

**AGENT:** 9

**CUSTOMER:** 9

**AGENT:** Yes ma'am...

**CUSTOMER:** Let me read it back to you: 11019008822312180599.

**AGENT:** That is correct, ma'am.

**CUSTOMER:** OK and that would be RPS or FedEx?

**AGENT:** Yes ma'am, it's RPS, do you have the number if not I can give that to you.

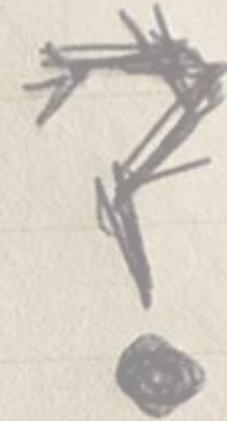
**CUSTOMER:** Yeah, if you would please

**AGENT:** OK ...



# Discourse analysis

What did you notice about the language in this interaction?



# Use the right instruments

- Existing information
- Tests
- Interviews
- Focus groups
- Questionnaires
- Observations
- Discourse analysis



# The process of needs assessment

- Involve the right people
- Pose the right questions
- Use the right instruments
- **Analyze and interpret the data**
- Construct the course



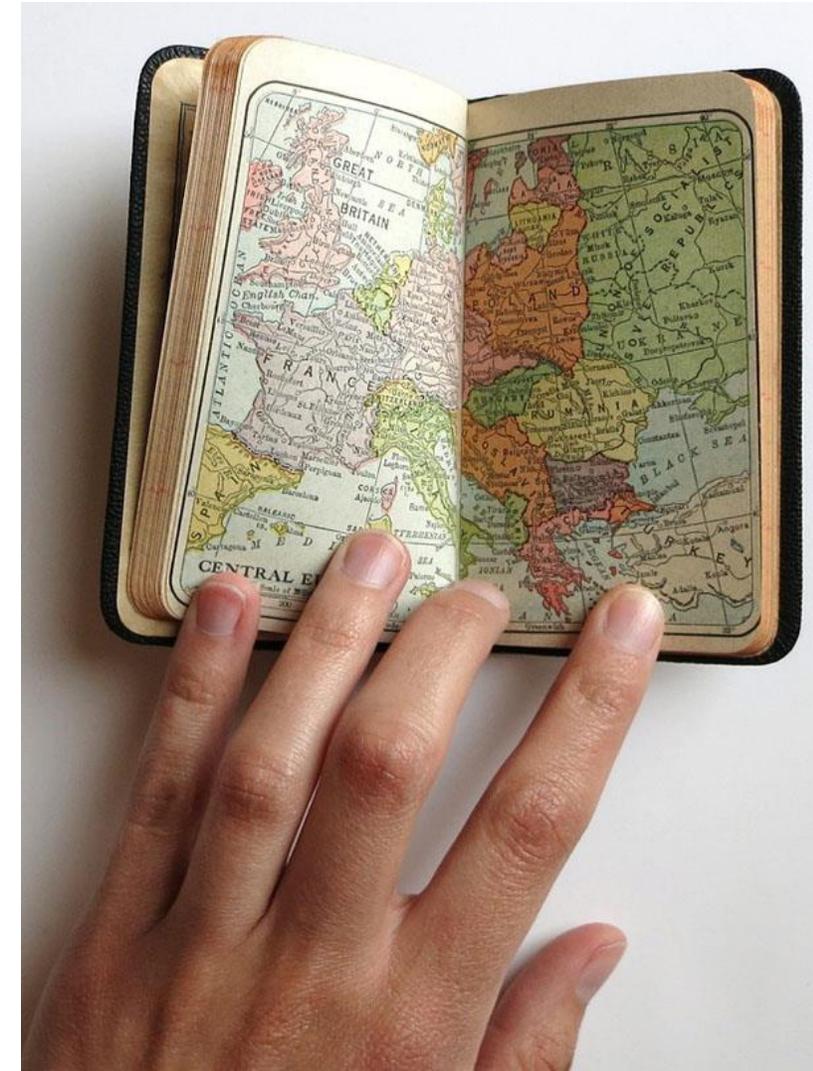
# Analyze and interpret the data

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- What does the data mean?
  - Sources
  - Patterns and trends
  - Different perspectives
- Who is the audience for your findings?
  - Do you need a formal report?
  - Don't discount your experience

# Road map

- What is needs assessment?
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# Course Development Processes: A Framework

(adapted from Graves, 2000)

Needs analysis



Goals and objectives



Content and organization



Develop materials



Design assessments



# Course development

## Goals and objectives



# Course development

## Goals and objectives

Overall goals for the course and students

Specific objectives and student learning outcomes

“By the end of the course, students will be able to . . .”

# Course development

## Content and organization



# Course development

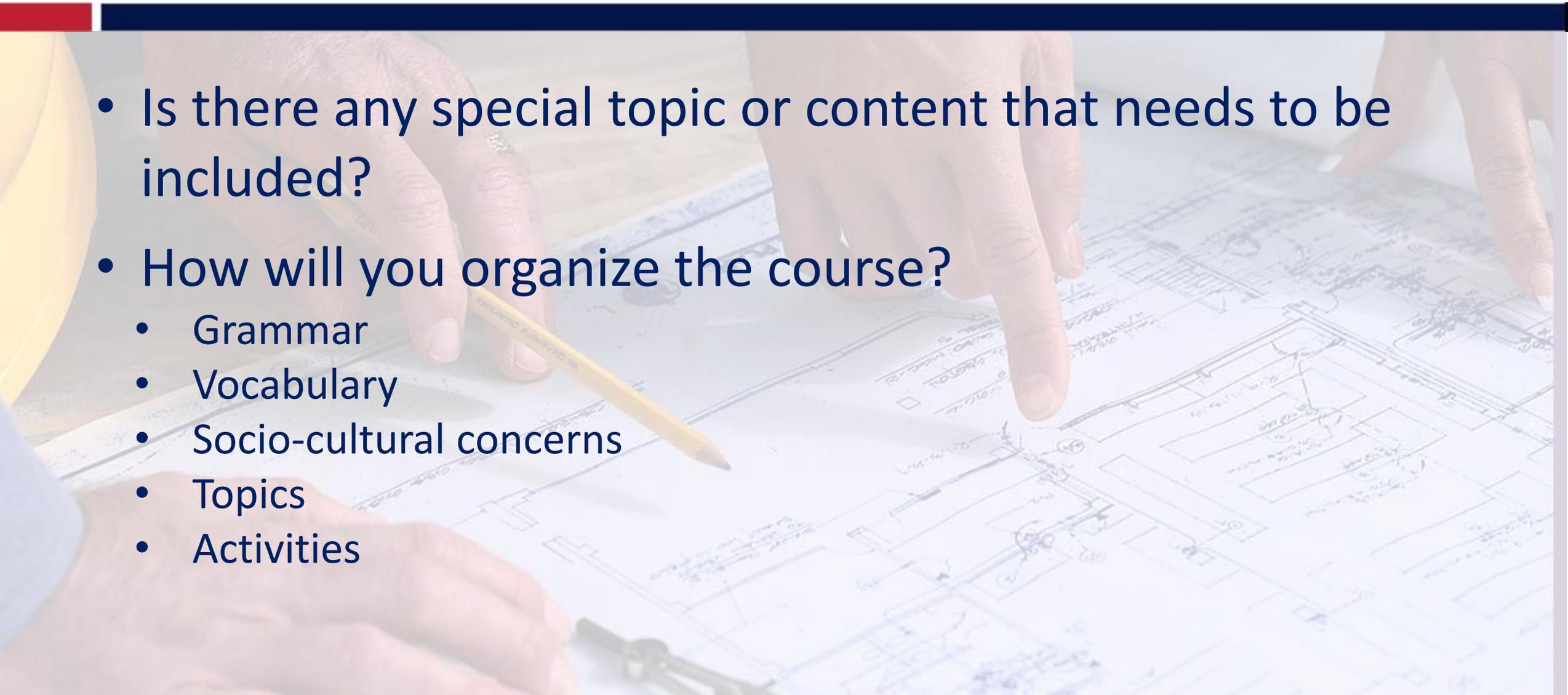
## Content and organization

What are some different ways to organize a course?

What might be the guiding principles?

# Course development

## Content and organization

- Is there any special topic or content that needs to be included?
  - How will you organize the course?
    - Grammar
    - Vocabulary
    - Socio-cultural concerns
    - Topics
    - Activities
- 
- A background image showing several hands working on architectural blueprints. One hand holds a yellow pencil, another points at a specific part of the drawing, and a third uses a compass. The blueprints are spread out on a table, and the scene is brightly lit.

# Course development

Develop materials



# Course development

## Develop materials

- Are there existing materials that can be used or adapted?
- Will existing materials meet learners' needs?
- Who will write new materials?
- How long will the whole course be?
- How long should each unit or chapter be?
- What content should each unit contain?
- What activities will work best with these learners?
- How can you provide consistency but also variety?

# Course development

## Design assessments



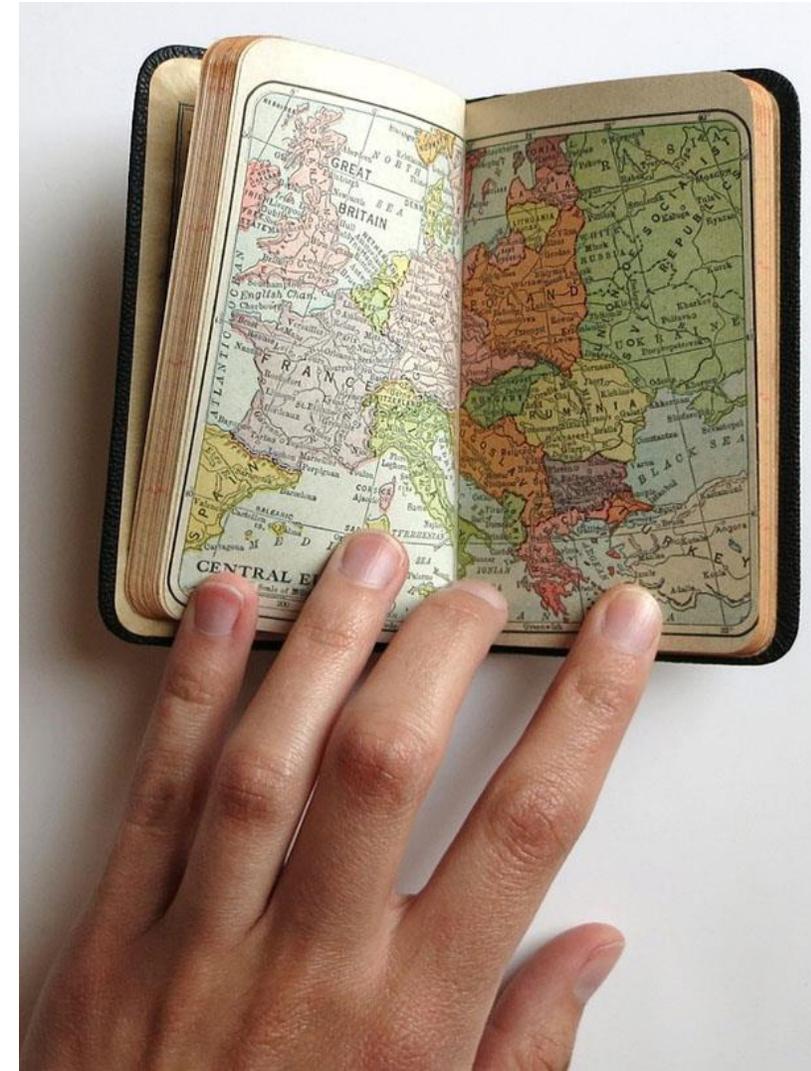
# Course development

## Design assessments

- Initial needs assessment
- Level placement
- Diagnostics
- Assessing student progress
- Assessing student achievement of learning outcomes
- How will you evaluate the success of the course itself?

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# What is a curriculum?

<b>Lesson plan</b>	What you will do in class today
<b>Course unit</b>	A small section of your overall course Maybe a chapter in your textbook
<b>Course syllabus</b>	A description of your entire course (or class) from start to finish
<b>Curriculum</b>	A description or framework for a series of courses which together make up a student's educational instruction

# Needs assessment for curriculum design

- Uses the same basic ideas
- Might take longer
- Involves more people (stakeholders)
- Formal written report
- Relates to standards and regulations
- Needs many people to put into practice



# Needs assessment for an existing course

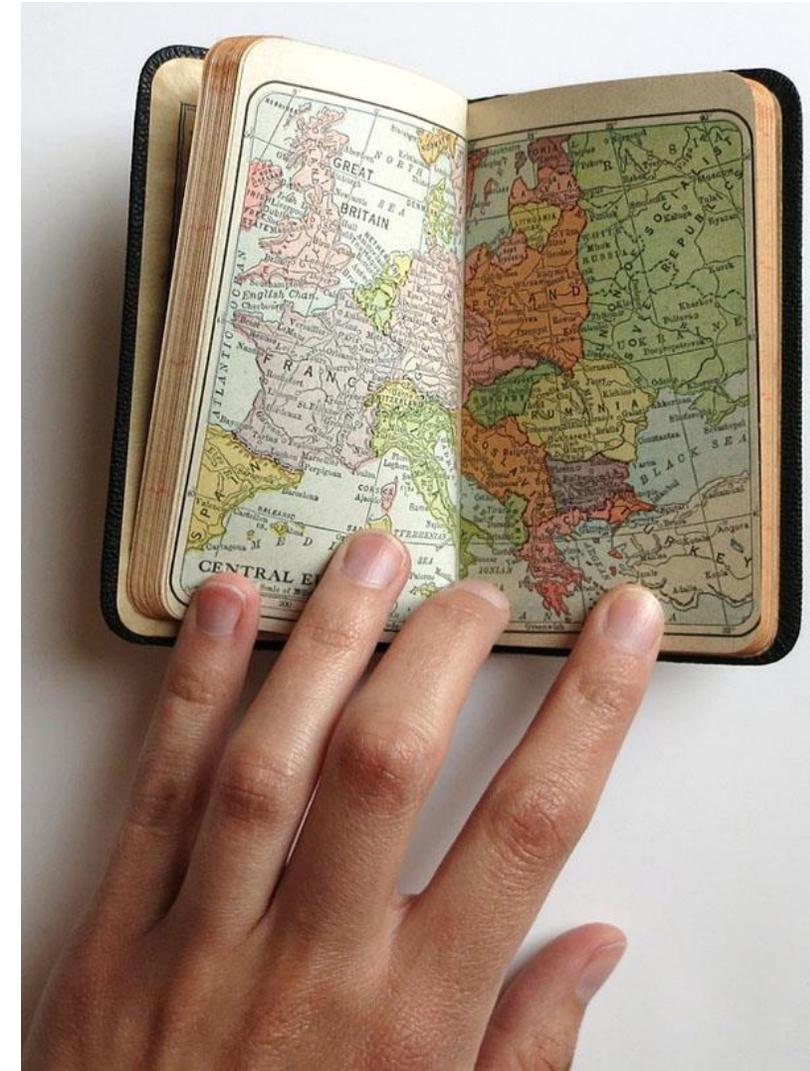
- Shorter and simpler
- Use your students
- Surveys about preferences and interests
- Provides flexibility to make changes in the course
- Can happen any time





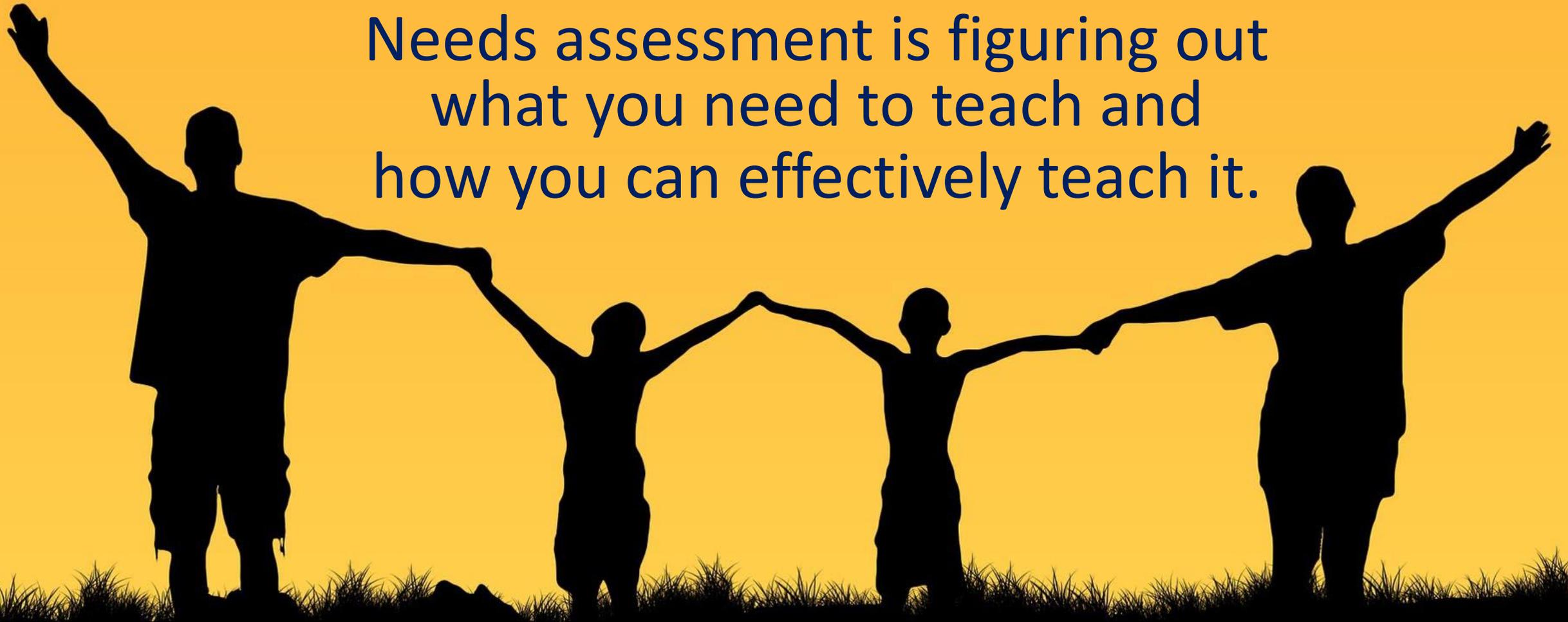
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# References

- Brown, H.D. (1995). *The elements of language curriculum: A systematic approach to program development*. Boston: Heinle and Heinle.
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# Thank you!

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# Reflection Questions

1. Have you ever designed, redesigned, or modified a course or curriculum? How did you collect information to make decisions? What lessons did you learn?
2. If you were to develop or redesign a course where you teach, who would the stakeholders be during the needs assessment and other course development steps?
3. What are the most important questions would you need to answer if you were asked to redesign a course at your institution?
4. If you aren't currently in the position to develop or redesign a course or curriculum, how can you use principles described in this webinar to ensure an existing course you teach best meets your students' needs?



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