SABES | MA Public Adult Education Professional Development System
A PUBLIC ADULT EDUCATION OF MA PROGRAM

What Does "Authentic" Mean?

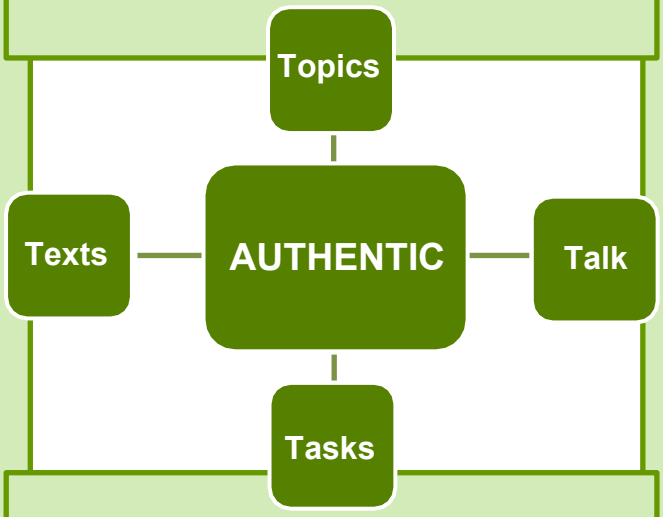
"Authentic" refers to materials, activities, and conversations adults might encounter outside the ABE setting. Effective ELA teachers provide regular opportunities for adult learners to engage with authentic **topics**, **texts**, **talk**, and **tasks**.

Authentic topics include domains of knowledge that have direct application to adult life, such as workforce preparation, civics, current events, health, the environment, parenting, financial literacy, etc.

Although topics studied at the intermediate and ASE levels should align closely with those found on high school equivalency exams, effective ELA teachers frame these in ways that have immediate and long-term relevance for adults (e.g., a unit on the branches of government might be framed in terms of "Making the Government Work for Me").

Authentic texts include digital and print texts that adults are likely to encounter outside the ABE classroom, whether in their workplaces, the community, or in further education or training.

Using real-life texts or close approximations enables adults to learn typical formats of various kinds of texts, navigate real-world distractions that often accompany these texts (e.g., ads, hyperlinks), and develop cognitive and metacognitive strategies that transfer to lifelong reading.



Authentic talk refers to the ways adults use oral language outside the classroom. These include such things as running or participating in meetings, making presentations at work or for the community, participating in parent/teacher conferences, advocating for a point of view, and having conversations about articles, books, TV shows, and movies.

Where possible, effective ELA teachers construct speaking and listening activities that simulate and prepare adult learners for these real-life uses of oral language.

Authentic tasks address the context in which learners engage with texts and talk. Why are they reading, viewing, writing, or listening to a particular text? What are they to do with it?

Ideally, what learners do with text during instruction corresponds with what they would do with text outside the classroom. So, although a newspaper is an authentic text, having students circle vocabulary words in the text is not something adults normally do. Having students read a newspaper to understand a current event would be an authentic task.

Not all tasks can be authentic, but effective ELA teachers make authentic uses of texts and talk a major focus of their instruction.

Adapted from p. 10 of the *ELA Proficiency Guide for Teachers of Adult Basic Education*