

Forum at 60

by TOM GLASS

Many things can change in 60 years. Methodologies for teaching language can change again and again. Widespread use of computers, cell phones, and the Internet can change lifestyles, careers—and language teaching. A pandemic can disrupt everything.

But many things can stay the same in 60 years, too. Knowledge of English and other languages can still open doors socially and professionally. English teachers' dedication to their students and their support for one another can be sustained. And *English Teaching Forum* can continue to publish articles that spread teaching ideas and strengthen English teaching worldwide.

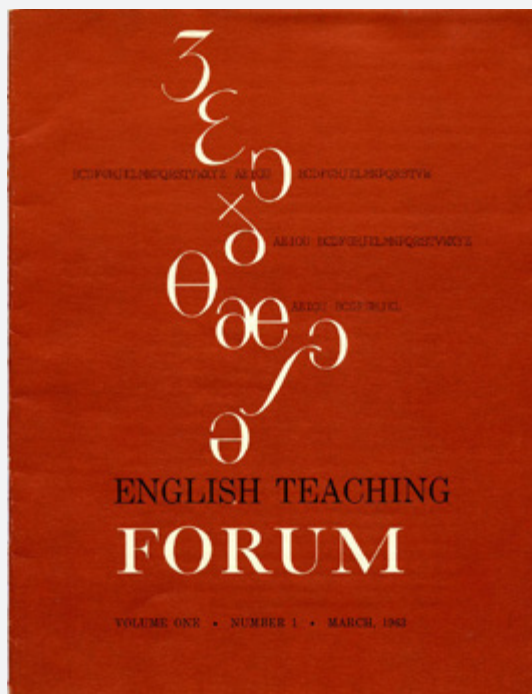
Of course, those are not the only things that have changed—or that haven't changed—over the last six decades. But this year, as *Forum* reaches its 60th anniversary, we celebrate with a series of articles reflecting on aspects of *Forum's* growth and development.

We'll begin with a brief rundown of the journal's history. *Forum* actually started off as a newsletter, featuring articles produced on a typewriter, copied, and mailed out to English teachers around the world. (Sixty years later, typewriters have pretty much disappeared, but typing skills are more valuable than ever.)

The newsletter was a hit, and as often happens with things that are popular, *Forum* grew



The popularity of this newsletter, published in 1962, led to the creation of *English Teaching Forum*.



The first cover of the brand-new journal, *English Teaching Forum*

NOTE This is the first of four articles commemorating the 60th anniversary of *English Teaching Forum*. Each 2022 issue will feature one of the articles.

bigger. It looked more like a magazine, with more pages and more articles.

And sometimes, copies of *Forum* were noticeably thicker. That's because *Forum* began offering bonus content in the form of inserts that were published right along with the articles.

Vinyl recordings—of songs, poems, and Aesop's fables, for example—were first offered in 1966 on what were called “soundsheets”; they were included in *Forum* periodically until 1995. By that time, vinyl records had become less popular and were being replaced by cassettes and the new sensation, compact discs (CDs). Teachers used cassette players and then, later, CD players in place of record players, which were joining typewriters on dusty shelves of school supply closets. In fact, in the future, historians might look back at copies of *Forum* and learn not only a lot about teaching methodologies of the time, but also something about changes in technology.

(These days, *Forum* is still able to offer recordings to readers. Instead of vinyl records, though, we simply provide links to audio resources, such as those available at americanenglish.state.gov.)

Issues of *Forum* included other inserts: posters, foldout maps (for example, of the



This 1985 record features readings of four “two-minute mysteries” from a book by Donald J. Sobol. The last record inserts were distributed in 1995.



By the late 1960s, *Forum* had a new look; this is the cover of a 1969 issue.

United States, of New York City, and of Washington, D.C.), and calendars marked with birthdays of well-known authors. These inserts found their way to walls of classrooms around the world. Teachers carefully took them out of *Forum*, unfolded them, and taped them up. Just like that, they had an attractive teaching resource, ready to be incorporated into their lessons.

An important part of *Forum*'s history is what it has looked like on the outside. Teachers I have met remember their favorite covers, and some comment on the different *Forum* logos that have been in use over the years. The current look debuted in 2015, and you can see previous logos on the



Forum Fact

In its 60-year history, *English Teaching Forum* has published more than 3,350 articles by authors representing 143 countries.

images of covers that accompany this article. While I am happy with the current look, other readers have their own favorites, such as the long-running smaller logo that was used from 1975 to 1999—and which included the words “A journal for the teacher of English outside the United States” inside the *O* in *FORUM*—or the lowercase *forum* logo that appeared on the cover in the early 2000s and that featured a tiny lizard.

Along with the cover designs, content has evolved, too. In 1982, *Forum* introduced a Teacher Correspondents section, which was made up of names and addresses of English teachers around the world who were interested in corresponding with others in the field. In effect, they were seeking professional pen pals with whom they could share ideas and build friendships. That section of *Forum* was quietly dropped in 1995 as electronic communication took over from traditional letter writing. Instead of using a pen, paper, an envelope, and a stamp, teachers could get in touch by using keystrokes and a click. (And by the way, do your Generation Z learners know what a “pen pal” is?)

While that section did not survive the digital wave, another section, introduced in 1976, still holds a prominent place in each issue of

THE LIGHTER SIDE

HAVE YOU EVER HAD ROAD RASH?

Take This Quiz and Find Out!

by Lisa Harshbarger

NASCAR drivers use special vocabulary, such as *pit stop* and *jack man*, to describe key elements of their sport. They're not alone, of course; race car drivers, truck drivers, mechanics and even motorcycle riders use special vocabulary to talk about the ups and downs of their sport or profession with their colleagues.

Can you join in on these conversations? The quiz below will test how “road-savvy” you are! Read each sentence carefully and pick the best answer. Good luck and safe driving!

- I got tired of *sitting in the rocking chair* all the time.
 - Waiting for the traffic light to change
 - Driving between several large trucks
 - Parking a vehicle in a very tight space
- If he were smarter, he wouldn't have all that *road rash*.
 - Cuts and bruises from falling onto the road
 - Damage to the fenders and sides of a car
 - Sunburn from sticking an arm out the window
- She hates to drive in the *granny lane*.
 - Parking lot outside a retirement home
 - Shopping district where people walk
 - Section of road with strict speed limits
- One more *invitation* and I'll take the keys away from you!
 - Broken headlight
 - Speeding ticket
 - Empty gas tank
- I think I need to get me some new *wets*.
 - All-weather tires
 - Windshield wipers
 - Leather car seats
- Look out for that *alligator!*
 - Police car
 - Rough road
 - Piece of tire
- She's never *t-boned* her Harley, as far as I know.
 - Crashed it into a vehicle
 - Broken it down for parts
 - Used it to carry groceries
- There are too many *cash registers* on that road for me.
 - Toll booths
 - Places to gamble
 - Fast food places
- Did he finally *get the green?*
 - Win a prize at the races
 - Buy a lime-colored car
 - See the green flag wave
- That *full tuck and roll job* really ruined the look of the car.
 - Removal of the car doors
 - Upholstery made for the car
 - Raising the car's chassis

Reference—Jackson, M. 2003. *Say what? An automotive slang guide*. <http://www.motor-cross.ca/saywhat.html>

The Lighter Side page has had different looks over the years but is still going strong. The quiz above appeared in 2005.

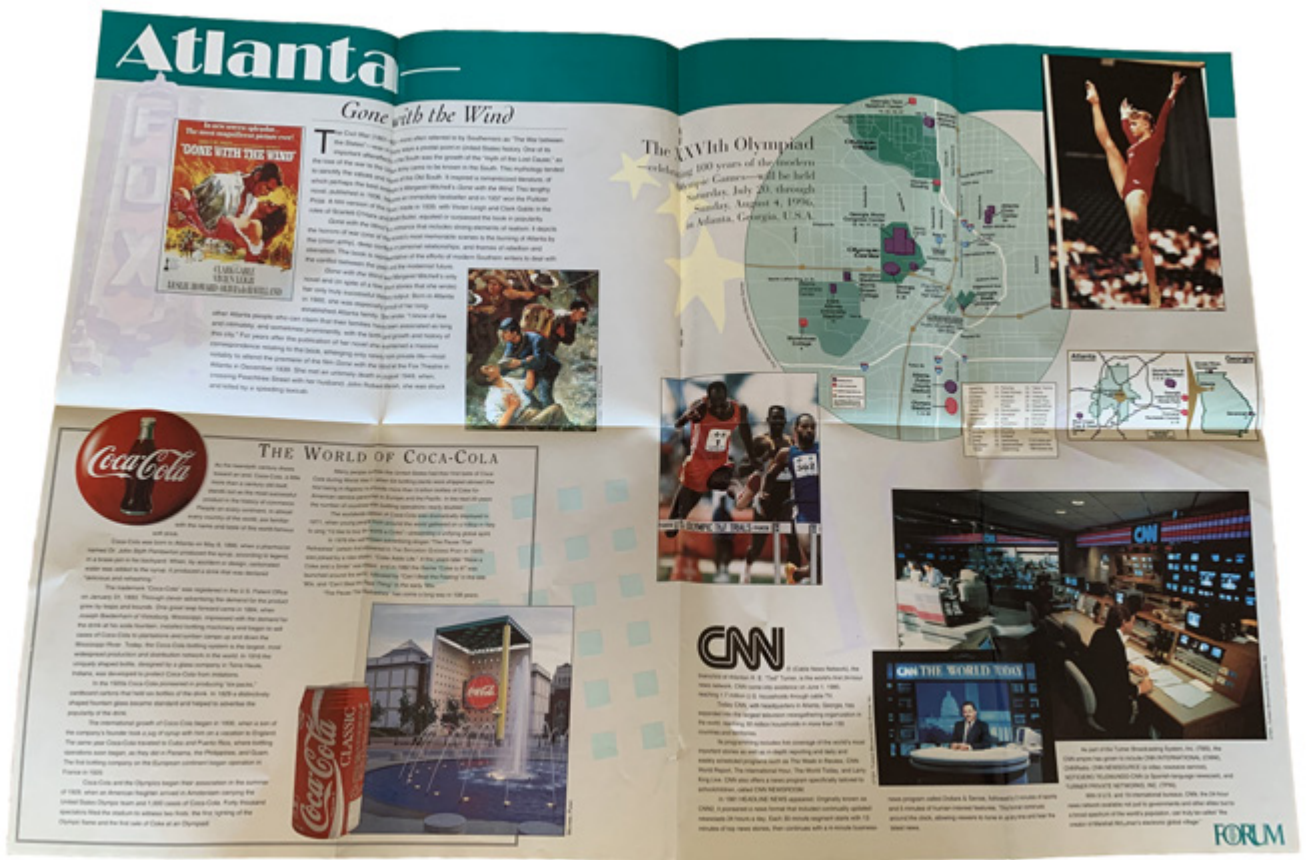
Forum: The Lighter Side. In its early days, the section featured jokes and riddles, many of which were republished from other sources.

Nowadays, The Lighter Side—on the inside back cover of each print issue—features puzzles, almost always based on language, and always original. One reason The Lighter Side has lasted so long is that offering jokes, riddles, and puzzles highlights one of our core beliefs: that learning (and teaching) English is *fun!*

The July 1986 issue focused on writing and included a comment from the editors on the benefits of a relatively new device, the word processor. The editors



A crisp poster of the United States, ready to be unfolded and displayed on a classroom wall, was included in a 1978 issue.



This poster of Atlanta, which was tucked into a 1994 issue, provided content for teachers interested in including lessons related to the 1996 Olympic Games in their courses.



The colorful cover of a 2005 issue focusing on the teaching of young learners

noticed how much easier it was to revise articles by using a word processor instead of typing out entire new drafts—or rewriting them by hand. And they realized that the word processor could become a valuable tool for teachers and writing students, too: the word processor’s “ease of deletion and change shows the act of writing to be a more fluid, amendable, informal, and creative process than we had previously thought it to be.” In other words, digital writing not only made revising much easier; it also gave writers insights into the entire creative process.

Eight years later, in 1994, *Forum* went online for the first time. Here’s the thing about tracking early digital history, though. While paper copies of *Forum* over 60 years give us a history that is easy to trace, we have been unable to find much evidence of what the first *Forum* webpages offered. (If anyone has clear memories of these—or if you saved screenshots of them—please let us know!)

ENGLISH TEACHING FORUM



VOLUME 52 NUMBER 3 2014

This design, with FORUM in block letters, featured a cover photo linked to an article on current and/or cultural topics of interest inside the issue. The theme for all four 2014 issues was pets.

In 2002, as *Forum* was celebrating its 40th year, former editor Thomas J. Kral noted the fast pace of technology and wondered whether *Forum* would still be publishing print copies when it turned 50, in 2012. As it turns out, he correctly anticipated that the online version of *Forum* would prove highly popular, but he also underestimated the ongoing demand for print copies. Sure enough, in 2022, although *Forum* content can be accessed and downloaded for free at the American English website, many teachers still prefer to get their quarterly doses of *Forum* in print form rather than online.

Somewhere in that timeline, after *The Lighter Side* was introduced but before the journal went online, I had my first experience with *Forum*. I was training to learn how to teach English as a foreign language effectively, and our group was assigned a number of articles

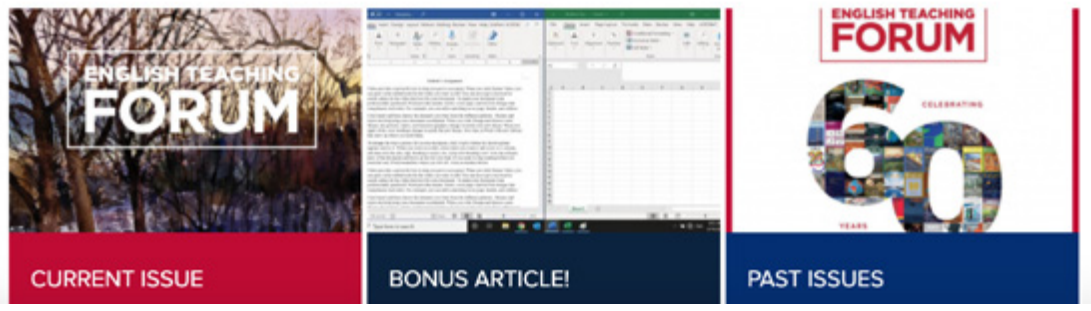
to read. We noticed something curious: many of those articles had been published in *English Teaching Forum*. I was struck not only by the usefulness of the ideas presented in the articles (especially at a time when, as a novice instructor, I was desperate for ideas, and *Forum* regularly came through) but also by the writing style, which was informative and professional, and almost always easy to comprehend.

Then, when I became a Peace Corps volunteer, teaching English in northeastern Thailand, there again was *Forum*. One of my colleagues was the proud possessor of many years' worth of issues of *Forum*, and on my first day in the office—even before I had a chance to sit at my desk—she showed me the department's teaching resources, many of which were copies of *Forum*. "You can find great ideas in there," she told me, unaware that I already knew that. She invited me to borrow



The current design, typically featuring original artwork, made its debut in 2015 with this artist's rendition of a street scene in a section of Washington, D.C.

ENGLISH TEACHING FORUM
Forum Journal
A Quarterly Journal for English Teachers



Forum's webpage (at americanenglish.state.gov) as of early 2022

a copy whenever I wanted—but also had me promise to make sure I put it back!

Her copies, like many copies of *Forum* I have seen over the years, were well read. Corners of pages were folded, some pages had been torn out or cut up, and puzzle answers had been filled in. Yet even older issues offered *something* useful—and yes, I did use one of the old *Forum* “records” to play recordings of poems for a poetry class I was teaching. I thought at the time that the journal was an invaluable resource, and I suspect many other teachers felt the same. As one editor wrote in the 1970s, “This journal now goes out in 80,000 copies to teachers in 115 countries on six continents, and we have continuing evidence directly from them that they love it. Many teachers . . . are now yelling because they want their *Forums!*”

These days, of course, you don’t have to yell if you want your *Forum*. You can still read it

in print form, and you can find it online at americanenglish.state.gov, where *Forum* ideas await you 24 hours a day, seven days a week, all year long. And as we begin our seventh decade, we don’t know exactly what future issues of *Forum* will look like or which topics will emerge. But for now, anyway, we look forward to adding more to the rich history of *Forum*, one great idea at a time.

Tom Glass has worked on *English Teaching Forum* since 2009 and has been editor in chief since 2017.