

Handout 5: Internet Activities – Strategies & Language

While there are many websites offering materials and practice activities specifically for EL teachers and learners, here we look the Internet as a source of **authentic material** (i.e. content not developed for ELT purposes).

There are two parts here. The first part is using the Internet to focus on **strategy development**. A learner who can use the Internet to develop their language is an **autonomous learner**. Often learners need training in how to use the web most effectively for self study. Activities 1-2 below help train learners in how to access online dictionaries and references for language analysis. The second part looks at activities which use the Internet in order to focus on and analyse authentic language in use. Activities 3-4 also focus on strategy developments as they train learners how they might utilise *Google* to analyse authentic language in use. Activity 5 focuses on topic related vocabulary while Activity 6 can be used to focus on any type of language (i.e. vocabulary, prepositions, verbs etc.).

Most of the following activities can be done using a smartphone/tablet instead of a PC.

FOCUS ON STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

1. Word Treasure

Level: A2↑

Time: 15 minutes+

Aim: to encourage students to think about how they record vocabulary

Technical requirements: One computer per group of 2 or 3

Preparation: Visit some websites dedicated to vocabulary reference (dictionaries / thesauruses / corpora) & choose two of the most diverse

Procedure:

1. Students discuss how they record new vocabulary
2. Students work in small groups to make a list of new words they have recently learnt
3. Students go to the first site & note down as much information about their ten words as they can. Encourage them to experiment with related words, and to use the full range of features offered
4. Students go to the other site and follow the same procedure
5. Class discussion on the kind of information they obtained from each site. What information would they now record about each word? Could they represent this information graphically or in a more interesting/memorable way?
6. Ask student to think about how they might use some of the techniques employed in the websites to list new words, in order to build themselves an effective learning resource.

This activity is great for **strategy development** in recording new vocabulary. Encourages students to think about vocabulary items and the variety of information they contain that is available for recording. Encourages them to think about ways of recording new items that suits their learning style. Directs them to a great online resource for self study.

2. Mapping Words

Aim: To raise awareness of what is involved in knowing a word

Level: B1↑

Technology: Online dictionary

Rationale: Learners often write a one-to-one translation of a word. They are often unaware of just how much is involved in knowing a word. This could be a good opportunity to introduce learners to the concept of collocation or connotation.

Preparation: Decide which online dictionaries you wish to use. Photocopy a work sheet which learners can use to create a word map (*Blended Learning* p 144)

Procedure:

1. Remind learners what is involved in knowing a word. This could include meaning, how to use it, forming derivatives (noun/adjective/adverb etc), understanding connotation, using collocation, and pronunciation. Demonstrate how to build up a word map (e.g. a word map for **economy** should include **economical**, **economist**, and any useful collocations such as **economically sound**, **economically viable**, etc.
2. Issue the work sheet. Learners in pairs choose a word to explore. Learners research their word and draw a word map of their word, e.g. in EAP and Business English, a key word from their subject area or field.
3. Learners present their word map to the group. If possible, take photocopies of their word maps for distribution to other learners.

Follow up: This activity could lead into further learner training on how to store words in their vocabulary notebooks e.g. by concept. Learners can create word maps for other key words; they can create their own meaningful sentences with some of the new expressions of collocations presented by others in the class. They can explore synonyms of their chosen word using the Visual Thesaurus website at www.visualthesaurus.com

FOCUS ON LANGUAGE

3. Conditional Conundrum

Aim: To raise awareness & promote noticing of the conditional structure and to familiarise learners with different resources for grammar study.

Level: B2↑

Technology: Grammar CD-ROM & Internet

Rationale: Learners need to be made aware of both standard construction & non-standard forms. The latter may include less frequent usage. The Internet is a repository of such non-standard language while grammar reference materials tend to showcase standard forms. This exercise promotes noticing.

Preparation: Bring in a few grammar reference books and a grammar reference CD-ROM. Check Internet access.

Procedure:

1. Ask learners to tell you how many conditional forms there are in English. Write their answers and example sentences on the board.
2. Divide the group into research teams. Tell them to check their assumptions using the following tools:

- Group 1 a grammar reference book
- Group 2: a grammar CD-ROM or the unit on conditionals in the courseware
- Group 3: The Web (this group should create examples of conditional sentences in order to type them into a search engine such as Google)

3. Groups reform to include one person from each research team. The learner discuss their findings. The learners report back on any differences in the information provided by the various source materials and any amendments they would like to make to their original ideas in step 1.

4. Debrief the task. What have they learned about the conditional form? Which source do they find most reliable /complete? Etc.

Variation: This activity can be used to research and analyse any grammatical form.

4. Grammar Checker

Level: C1

Aims: To check the understanding of a grammar keyword

Technology: One computer per group of 2 or 3

Preparation: Select the keywords you wish your learners to investigate and test them in the search engine you intend your learners to use. Google news search is especially good for this activity. As a test, try the word may and see how many examples you can note down from the first 30 results which demonstrate its uses for giving permission and talking about future possibility

Procedure:

1. Give your learners the key words you want them to investigate and tell them which search engine you want them to use. You could assign different search engines to different pairs.
2. Before they go to the computers, ask the learners to note down what they think the key word is used for and give at least one example sentence for each use.
3. At the computer the learners have a time limit to search for other sentences that confirm their idea about the key word's use or add to or modify that idea.
4. After searching, the learners compare their results. They can use a grammar text to check any that they are not confident about

Follow on: You can return to previous mistakes your learners have made with the key words they tested and ask them to correct these mistakes in the light of any new information they have acquired. As always, it is important to give your learners the opportunity to use the target language in a fluency activity.

5. Just the Job (Focus on topic-related vocabulary)

Level: B1↑

Time: 60 minutes

Aim: to practise vocabulary related to jobs & employment; to compare requirements & conditions for the same job in two different countries

Technical requirements: One computer per group of 2 or 3

Preparation: Find some sites that provide information about jobs in Ireland & Britain or USA. Copy the worksheet for each student/group or prepare your own

Procedure:

Elicit job titles. Ask students to choose one each and to think about the following for their own country:

- *What qualifications are needed for the job*
- *What is involved in doing the job*
- *What the pay might be*
- *Where the jobs are likely to be located*

Put students who are going to research the same or similar jobs into groups of 2-3

Send them to the recruitment sites to research their chosen job and complete the worksheet

Class discussion on their findings

6. Authentic Text Gap-fill (focus on language which can be decided upon by teacher or students)

Level: B1↑

Time: 45 minutes

Aim: For learners to create a gap-fill exercise using an authentic text from the Web

Technical requirements: One computer per group of 2 or 3

Preparation: This activity works best if you have created and used similar material with your learners so that they are familiar with the concept.

Procedure:

1. The whole class brainstorms a topic they would like to focus on. They also discuss and agree on the type of language they are going to remove to make their gap-fill exercises, e.g. prepositions, verbs, etc. Finally they agree on whether or not to include the missing words as part of the exercise.
2. At the computer they work in pairs to search & find a text on the agreed topic
3. They copy that text into a Word document and replace their chosen words with _____ . If it has been agreed to include the missing words, then these should be inserted at the top of the page.
4. The completed gap-fill exercises are printed and distributed to other members of the group or posted online, and the other students try to complete the exercise.