

THE ONLINE ENGLISH TEACHER

Everything you
need to teach,
find students
and change the
way you make
money



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Introduction

It's 6pm in sultry Phuket, a beach paradise on the Andaman coast of Thailand. The sun has gone down and given way to a balmy evening. I'm sitting in a small coffee shop overlooking the ocean and flip open my laptop. 7000 kilometres away, Dasha has just finished work early and is sitting in her local coffee shop in the suburbs of Moscow and launches Skype. A moment later our lesson begins. It's 7pm in Manila: Theresa sits in her townhouse and enters Google Hangouts, where she hooks up with Ling, an 18 year old university student from Shanghai who hopes to study in Britain next year. It's noon in Manchester where Steve, an unemployed construction worker, puts on his headset and phones, via Skype, Carlos, a waiter from Barcelona who, having just finished his morning shift, wants to improve his English skills and find a better job. All around the world, people who want to learn English are jumping online and connecting with English speakers who want to make money by teaching English. It's a revolution in English language teaching. And you can be part of it too.

Can you speak English? Can you use a computer? Then you can teach English online. It's that simple. You don't need qualifications, you don't need a university degree, you don't need any investment, and you don't need to speak another language - you simply need an internet connection and an open mind.

You see, technology has now made it possible for English speakers from all over the world to work for themselves, enabling them to teach from anywhere, to students from everywhere. Technology has levelled the playing field, enabling individual teachers to find students and the best materials, enabling them to set up their own online schools.

At the same time, globalisation means that there are now billions of potential students. We now live in a world in which travelling and instant communication around the world for work, study and pleasure is taken for granted. But a globalised world needs a global language and that global language is English.

Fluency in English doesn't just help people from non-English speaking countries speak to native English speakers, it helps anyone from anywhere to speak to anyone else. Fluency in English helps a Russian tourist order a meal in a restaurant in Bangkok; it helps a Slovakian sales representative do a deal with a Korean business executive; it helps a Chinese tourist buy a train

ticket in Amsterdam; it helps a football player from Argentina communicate on the pitch with, not just his English teammates, but teammates from Brazil, Japan and the Ivory Coast; it helps a student from Somalia study at Harvard or Oxford. The world wants to speak English, because it's a tool that opens up life changing opportunities.

So the technology is there, and the students are there. So why should you become an Online English Teacher?

You can make money...and time and freedom!

Teaching English online can change the way you make money and live your life. It's a great way to make a good income working just a few hours a week. This makes it ideal for those of you who want to supplement an existing income, or to provide an independent income for those of you who want to work from home, perhaps because you have young children to look after or because you have a physical disability. Online English teaching is also ideal for students who want to earn extra money working just a few hours a week, or for retirees who want to make use of their life experience and knowledge to help others and make money at the same time. And if you're seeking a break from full-time work, or you are unemployed, online English teaching is ideal for you too.

And because you can earn a good income from just a few hours a week, it gives you more time and freedom to work on the things that are important to you: spending time with family and friends, travelling around the world and even the time to work on other projects that you have never seemed to have time to do. And you have the freedom to work when you want and where you want. In this book, we will show you how to maximize your income by focusing on highly specific niche markets of students, and through leveraging the benefits of location independence, maximizing your income by teaching students from wealthy countries while living where the cost of living is low.

You can gain personal satisfaction

There is a great amount of satisfaction and achievement that comes with teaching English online. Helping people to learn, and achieve their dreams is what we do. You will build relationships with your students over time and learn about their culture just as much as they learn about yours.

Startup costs are zero

If you already have a computer, a tablet or a smartphone and an Internet connection, you already have everything you need to teach English online. The basic tools you need to develop an online

teaching business are free to use. And billions of webpages containing videos, lesson plans, games and activities are also free. You can even market yourself for free. We'll show you how.

The technology is out there

The technological revolution of recent years has made computers and mobile devices, as well as Internet connectivity, affordable and available for billions. It's only been around for less than a decade, but tools like Skype and Facebook have made communication with people on the other side of the world fast, free and reliable.

You can be your own boss

You're in charge! You don't have to follow office rules or the random whims of your boss. You don't have to complete lots of pointless paperwork and attend dull meetings. You control your own timetable, you decide your break-times, and you can't get sacked, suspended or laid off.

You can hand pick your own students

Using the tools contained in this book, you will be able to build your own list of students. They will come to you for lessons.

You can work from home....

....or from a coffee shop, a beach or the comfort of your own bed, anywhere you can get a decent Internet connection. No commuting for an hour or more every day, stuck in traffic jams or walking through rain, snowdrifts or sweltering heat. No bus fares or petrol costs. No being exposed to people's coughs and colds on public transport or in classrooms or offices. And if you have young children, you can work from home and look after them, avoiding the costs of day care.

Aim and outline of the book

We've written this book for both experienced English teachers - whether in the classroom or online - and for people who have never taught in their lives. For experienced teachers, we'll give you a wealth of tips and ideas for adapting your teaching for online lessons and for making your teaching even better. If you've never taught before, we will show you how to become the best teacher you can be without gaining those expensive qualifications, showing you the basic principles of what really happens when you teach a person of a foreign nationality. For everyone, we will show you how to make the online teaching experience both great for you and your students. We will take you through the journey all the way from setting up your computer, to

finding students, to getting paid, to teaching your first lesson, to extending your skills in the future.

Many online teachers, whether they are experienced or inexperienced, have two more key questions: “what should I teach?” and “how should I teach it?” We are both experienced teachers with over 30 years of teaching practice between us, both in the classroom and online. We have trained teachers all over the world in how to teach English, and we’ll do the same for you, answering such questions as “do I use a coursebook?”, “how do I teach grammar?”, “do I do all the talking?”, “how can I teach conversational English?”, “where can I find good materials?”, “how do I teach writing?” and lots more.

In Section 1 we will show you how to get started. We will describe the essential toolkit that every online English teacher needs before helping you decide what you are actually going to teach. We will explain to you the powerful possibilities opened by teaching English to a specific niche of students, what we call ‘Niche English’, and then show you not just how to get paid, but how to maximise your pay by teaching students who pay the highest rates while living where the cost of living is low.

Section 2 shows you how to teach English. In this section, we will go through the different elements of English Language teaching that will appear in your lessons, such as vocabulary, writing, reading and so on. We will show you how these are taught and give you tried-and-tested activities for each. This section will form the basis of your lessons.

Section 3 shows you how to find resources and materials for lessons. We have compiled some of the best links and resources available for you to get going as an online English teacher. You will find everything from fun games to serious grammar activities.

Our book also comes with a companion website – theonlineenglishteacher.com – where you can find a free toolkit and other resources to help you get up and running straight away.

About the authors

Charlie and Mat have worked in the field of English language teaching for a combined total of over 30 years, teaching students from all over the world. They have lived and worked in the UK, Japan, Thailand, Hong Kong, Kenya, Slovakia, Hungary, Russia and The Philippines. Both of them gained the highest possible grade when training to become certified English language teachers. Mat has a diploma in English language teaching (DELTA), is a DELTA local tutor and an examiner. Charlie has a Masters degree in Education and a postgraduate certificate in education (PGCE) from the UK. They are both experienced teacher trainers and have given lectures and seminars on English language teaching across Europe and Asia.

Part 1

How to get started

Section 1

The Essential Toolkit

So, if you are ready to become an online English teacher, what exactly do you need to get you started? In this chapter we describe your essential toolkit. The great thing is, you might find that you already have everything you need to get going!

Here, then, is The Online English Teacher's essential toolkit:

1. You

While there are vast libraries of language learning tools out there, from CD courses, to interactive websites, to smartphone apps, to coursebooks, all of which can be good in their own way, none of them can replace you. You can't hold a conversation with a website, no matter how sophisticated its voice recognition software, and even the best software can't give accurate and timely feedback on speaking and writing.

The most important part of an online English teacher's toolkit is you, the teacher. Never forget this! You are the language model, you are the communicative partner, you are the giver of feedback, you are the one who crafts the lesson so that your student has opportunities to learn English. And everything else in this chapter is simply there to support you.

2. A Communication Device

You need a device that lets you communicate with your student: this could be a desktop computer or a notebook computer, a tablet computer or a smartphone. It doesn't need to be a top of the range, high specification model, just something fast enough to run the communication software we'll talk about later. In fact, I know online English teachers who simply use their phone to carry out lessons. If all you plan to do is offer conversational practice with people locally, then a phone is really all you need.

3. A webcam or a microphone

If you are using a desktop computer, you will also need to get an external microphone or a webcam with a microphone. Pretty much all notebook computers, tablets and smartphones come with a camera or webcam, and a microphone, built in. Sometimes, the video and audio quality of these can be poor, especially on cheaper notebooks, but even these are usually adequate for the needs of the Online English Teacher.

However, many online English teachers don't use webcams. They just have audio conversations with their students, arguing that it helps the student concentrate more on listening and that video can be a distraction (particularly if it doesn't work properly); this has the added advantage of taking up less of your Internet bandwidth. I prefer to use video because it makes the communication feel more personal and you can also use body language and gestures to communicate, useful with a low level student. You can also see if they're confused or, perish the thought, bored! But it's up to you.

4. A headset

Headphones are a really useful addition to your toolkit. You can use speakers to listen to your student, but speakers often cause problems such as feedback: if you are listening to your student through speakers, their voice can also be picked up by the microphone, meaning the student gets to hear themselves speaking at the same time as they are trying to speak, a recipe for confusion! A headset will often have a microphone attached but beware of cheap headsets – microphones on cheap headsets are often poor quality with wiring that can snap easily when you move the microphone, so it's better to invest in a good quality headset. Or you can do what I do: use the microphone built into my webcam along with cheap earphones.

5. A reliable Internet connection

Unless you are just making local phone calls, you'll need an Internet connection. Both you and your student need to have a reliable Internet connection to use communication software effectively. Note that we say reliable; this doesn't necessarily mean fast. Skype, for example, only requires a connection speed of 100kbps to have an audio conversation, and a speed of between 300kbps and 500kbps for a video conversation. However, if you are using an HD webcam, Skype recommends 1.5Mbps. Note that these figures refer to both download and upload speeds: the live video and audio of you is being uploaded to your student, while you are downloading your student's live video and audio. This means your upload speed needs to be fast enough to cope, and upload speeds are usually much slower (sometimes 10 times slower) than download speeds.

I used to have problems when using an HD webcam connected to my laptop when staying in hotel rooms around Thailand. (Hotels can be notorious for having slow Internet speeds.) The solution was simple: I unplugged the HD webcam from the laptop, and used the laptop's cheap, in-built webcam instead; while the video quality wasn't as good, the Internet connection could now cope.

So be aware of your upload and download speeds. Incidentally, the connection speed your ISP claims to have given you is often not the speed you will really be getting. If you're using WiFi, it can be much slower. If you're using WiFi in a public place like a hotel or café, it can be really

slow, depending on how many other people are using the WiFi and what they're doing with it. In any case, the speeds can vary, so it's best to check your Internet connection speed yourself at www.speedtest.net.

It's also possible to use 3G and, in an increasing number of places, 4G cellular networks. 3G is supposed to mean you get a minimum of 2Mbps when you're not moving, which should be enough for even an HD webcam, but remember that the speed of a mobile network depends, as with public WiFi hotspots, on how many people around you are using it. If you live in a city with 4G networks, you can expect a speed of 1Gbps.

6. Communication Software

So, now you've got a communication device hooked up to the Internet, with a way to hear and be heard by your student, all you need now is a way to connect to them and a way for them to connect to you. Enter communication software, and we'll start with the most popular of these, Skype.

Skype

When it first came out in 2003, Skype was revolutionary because it allowed people to use the Internet for calling people anywhere in the world instead of the telephone, meaning you avoided expensive international and trunk call charges. Suddenly, you could talk to someone on the other side of the world, for free, as long as they also had Skype installed and were online when you called them.

Skype allows you to make video, audio and text conversations over the Internet for free. It's simple to use, it's free and it's been around for a long time, so it's widely used and widely accepted. I've found it to be reliable enough and so it should be your first port of call when communicating online. All you need is to download and install the Skype software from www.skype.com, and set up a Skype account. You can install "Skype for Desktop" on Windows, Mac and Linux computers, and you can also install slimmed down versions of Skype for smartphones and tablet computers by going to your device's app store to install the relevant Skype app. Your students need to do the same. And then you're both ready to start.

To contact your students, you'll need to know their Skype usernames: click or tap on "contacts" or "add people" and you can add each student to your Skype contact list. When it's lesson time, you simply click on their name and choose whether you want a video or an audio conversation. The only time I don't use video is if the connection gets a bit slow: sometimes, you might find that the audio and video start to break up and if that happens, you can simply turn off the video (by clicking or tapping on the video camera icon), meaning all the bandwidth is available for audio. This usually fixes any problems.

Sharing Files on Skype

Another useful feature of Skype is that it lets you send files to other users, meaning you can send worksheets, images and sound files to your student as part of your lesson. However, I've found that sending files over Skype can be quite slow. It may take several minutes for your student to receive the file, which can disrupt the flow of your lesson.

One solution is to email any materials to your student before the lesson. Which they can either print out or view on screen. Another is to put the file on the Internet and send your student a link to the file. Google Drive is a great place to store material and share it with other people; Google Drive will give you a link to the file, which you copy and paste into Skype's text conversation box. If the file is already on the Internet, send your student a link to that. This way, you don't need to waste time sending your student anything; your student simply looks at the file on the Internet.

Screen sharing on Skype

An alternative to sharing files on the Internet is to share the contents of your screen with your student. This can be done using Skype's screen sharing feature.

In a nutshell, screen sharing lets you show your student anything that's on your own computer screen. This might be a photo, a PowerPoint slide show, some sentences in a Word document, a worksheet, a page scanned in from a coursebook or a website. For example, you could put together some materials for a lesson on PowerPoint, and share the slide show with your student.

To enable screen sharing then, once you're in a conversation with your student, click the + icon at the bottom of the conversation window and click "share screen". You will then have the choice of sharing your entire screen or a specific window on your screen. Then you click "start". Note that screen sharing is only available on the Mac and PC versions of Skype, not tablet computer or smartphone versions of Skype.

Google Hangouts

Google Hangouts – www.google.com/hangouts - is one of the main rivals to Skype. As with Skype, it lets you make video, audio and text conversations. One significant difference from Skype is that Google Hangouts is web-based. In other words, you don't need to install anything, as long as you have a web browser, like Internet Explorer or Google Chrome, on your computer. All you then need is a Google account. Once you have a Google account, you will get your very own Google+ page (Google+ is Google's social networking site, its rival to Facebook). Google Hangouts is simply a communication tool embedded into your Google+ page. This means that the lesson with your student takes place within your Google+ page. Because you can add posts to your Google+ page (just as you can add posts to your Facebook page) you can post lesson

materials (such as news articles, links to websites, videos and photos) to your Google+ page in advance of the lesson. In effect, you can use your Google+ page as a place for showing lesson materials to your student.

Because it's made by Google, Hangouts is closely integrated with other Google-run tools, including Google Drive, Google Docs, Google Pages and YouTube. In fact, you can even record your Hangout session and save it on to YouTube for viewing and listening later. You can also integrate Google apps into your Hangouts session, including Google Sketchpad, an app which can be used as an interactive whiteboard.

Zoom

Zoom - www.zoom.us - is a video conferencing tool that also includes an online whiteboard. One of the big advantages of using zoom is that it adjusts the amount of bandwidth it uses according to the type of connection you are using (e.g. wired, wireless, 3G or 4G connection).

WizIQ

Another tool worth checking out is WizIQ - www.wiziq.com. This is a video conferencing tool designed with teachers and learners in mind and includes an online whiteboard.

Facebook and FaceTime

FaceTime is also worth exploring if teacher and student has an Apple device. And, of course, using the video chat tool in Facebook is worth considering.

Virtual Classrooms

Both Skype and Google Hangouts enable you to have video conversations with up to 10 people including yourself. This means that you can teach several students, potentially from all over the world, all at the same time, just as you might do in a physical classroom. In Skype and Google Hangouts, this is known as a group chat or a group Hangout; to the Online English Teacher, this is a virtual classroom.

While it's a little more complicated to set up and get everyone online together, it's a very lucrative way to develop your online teaching career because you have up to nine paying students at the same time instead of just one. Because you can't give each student the kind of personal attention that you'd give a single student in a one-to-one lesson, you probably wouldn't want to charge each student in a group the same rate as you'd charge a single student. Nevertheless, even if you're charging students in a group lesson half the rate of a one-to-one student, you'd earn over four times as much money in an hour with 9 students.

To make this work, you need a fast download speed because you'll be receiving live video from several webcams at the same time. Skype recommends a download speed of 4Mbps if there are

5 people in the group chat, and 8Mbps with 7 people, although they recommend no more than 5 people in a group chat.

Group chats on Skype and Google Hangouts are free (you used to have to purchase a premium edition of Skype to create group chats, but in April 2014 Skype made it a free service.)

7. Online Whiteboards

Screen sharing, which you can do on Skype, is a great way of showing material on your screen to your student, such as PowerPoint slides and images. But all a student can do is look. If you want to take things a step further, you should consider using an online whiteboard, one that both you and your student can interact with at the same time during a lesson. We use these a lot in our online lessons.

IDroo – www.idroo.com - is one such online whiteboard, and in our opinion it is by far the best. You can type text on to the whiteboard, insert images and documents (including Word and PDF documents), and you can draw on the whiteboard. You can also move, rotate and resize everything. And the whiteboard is endless, so you will never run out of space. You simply need to send your student the link to your IDroo board - the link is displayed in a box next to your board. IDroo is a good place to upload any materials you want to use for your lesson, and you can prepare your whiteboard in advance of the lesson. A free account on IDroo allows you to save up to 10 whiteboards. Because you and your student can move things around on the screen, it opens up lots of possibilities for making interactive activities, such as matching words and pictures, or by ordering words in a sentence or sentences in a text. For these interactive activities, your student will also need to create an IDroo account. Because it is web-based, you don't need to install anything and it will work on all platforms and devices including Windows, Linux and Mac computers, and iOS and Android tablets.

Twiddla – www.twiddla.com is another online whiteboard. It has similar features to IDroo but also includes a tool for holding a voice conversation within the Twiddla page, meaning you don't need to use communication software like Skype at the same time. You can invite someone to a Twiddla meeting either by sending them a link, or by getting Twiddla to send them an email.

Section 2

What are you going to teach?

Most freelance teachers (whether teaching online or face-to-face) will approach getting lessons this way: first of all, find a student, and then decide what to teach them. And what they decide to teach them will be, well, 'English'. Now, 'English' is a pretty big thing, so it's easy to get lost when trying to decide what you need to teach your student. So to help both you and your student, what we're going to suggest in this chapter is a reverse approach: first decide what you're going to teach, and then find students to teach this to - this is why we've put this chapter before the chapter on finding students!

Traditional Approach

1. Find a student
2. Decide what you are going to teach

Our Approach

1. Decide what you are going to teach
2. Find a student

The traditional 'finding a student' and then 'deciding what to teach them' approach is rather like Apple trying to find customers first and then deciding what to sell them. Any company that approached sales like this would soon go out of business. What Apple (and all customer-oriented businesses) do is to first craft a product, such as the Apple Watch or the iPhone, then put it out on the market. Then customers take a look and decide if it's what they want or need.

So to be successful at marketing, you first need to decide on your product, then offer it to the customer. For the Online English Teacher, this means you first need to decide what you are going to teach, then make it available to potential students.

So what is your product?

In marketing terms, whether or not a customer will buy a product is essentially whether or not they think the product will add value to their life. People will swap hard earned cash for a new pair of jeans because they think it will make them look good and feel good; they'll swap their cash for an Apple Watch because they think it will help them organize their life, stay healthy and

look cool. People will also swap their cash for your time as their online teacher because they think that becoming more proficient in English will add value to their life.

How can English add value to a person's life?

Being able to communicate in English is, today, a massively powerful tool. It can add value to people's lives in many different ways:

- ➔ English enables people to get better jobs and better pay.
- ➔ English enables people to study at some of the top universities around the world.
- ➔ English enables people to do business with other people around the world.
- ➔ English enables people to make friends with people around the world.
- ➔ English enables people to fall in love.
- ➔ English enables people to understand a lecture at a medical conference.
- ➔ English enables people to read more widely.
- ➔ English enables people to play football with players from around the world.
- ➔ English enables people to pass school examinations.
- ➔ English enables people to travel almost anywhere in the world.

and much more! In short, the ability to communicate in English enables people to do more with their lives.

In marketing speak, there is a fundamental rule: the more value a product adds to a person's life, the more money they will be prepared to pay for it. To the Online English Teacher, the rule is this: the more value your English lessons adds to your student's life, the more money they will be prepared to pay for it.

General and conversational English

Most online English teachers tend to offer lessons in 'General English' or 'conversational English'. In General English lessons you might cover topics, vocabulary and grammar related to everyday language use, such as ordering food in a restaurant, going shopping or talking about dreams and ambitions. In conversational English lessons, your aim might be to improve the conversational fluency and accuracy of the student, or it might be simply to give them practice speaking English with you.

While these are not bad ideas, and are certainly a good way to get started as an online English teacher – and in part two of the book, we’ll give you lots of ideas for doing these types of lesson effectively and enjoyably – we’d also recommend considering offering specialised lessons that cater to the needs of a specific part of the massive English language learner market. We call this, ‘Niche English’.

Niche English

In order to be a successful online English teacher, you should try to offer a specific product. So don’t offer ‘conversational English’ or ‘general English’. Thousands of other English teachers, both in schools and online, are doing exactly the same. Think of things from the student’s point-of-view. What do they really want? Perhaps they have to give a presentation at a medical conference in 6 months, or they are going to go on holiday to London in the summer, or they need to take an examination in English, or they have developed a passion for Jane Austen and want to read her novels in the original English.

So what the student really wants is to develop presentation skills in English, or language related to tourism and directions, or exam preparation, or to develop their reading skills. We’ll go into more detail about how to find out what your student really wants out of their English lessons in the chapter on “Needs Analysis” in part 2 of the book, but the point we want to make here is that the key to being successful as an online English teacher is to offer what students really want. Offer a product that they will value highly.

There are three major benefits to you by doing this:

1. By crafting a more specific product, you will be adding more value to it.
2. By offering a more value, you can charge premium rates.
3. A product that is specific to a smaller market sector is easier to market because you can identify your potential customer base more easily.

In fact, there is a whole branch of the teaching English industry dedicated to tailoring teaching towards specific needs. It’s called English for Specific Purposes.

English for Specific Purposes

Imagine a Korean doctor attending a medical conference in the USA. He will be attending lectures and seminars about the latest medical research given by doctors from all around the world, all of them presented in English. In order to understand them, he needs a strong base in general English, but he will also need to know words and phrases that are specific to the medical profession as well as the kind of language found in research papers.

Now imagine a young, up-and-coming Russian tennis player. She has just moved to Florida to work with a top coach (the coach was originally from the Czech Republic). She needs to communicate with her coach about issues connected with how she is playing the game, but she also needs to talk about her health and fitness, nutrition and exercise with her fitness coach and nutritionist. And once she starts playing in the top tournaments, she will need to be able to answer questions from journalists in press conferences.

So you could offer English lessons for people in the medical profession, or English for Korean doctors, or English for medical conferences, or English for tennis players, or English for Russians, or English for press conferences, or...

- ➔ English for Spaniards
- ➔ English for Koreans
- ➔ English for doctors and nurses (medical English)
- ➔ Academic writing courses
- ➔ English for football players
- ➔ English for Spanish football players
- ➔ English for artists
- ➔ English for musicians
- ➔ English for cat lovers – “Talk to your cat in English!”
- ➔ English for Chinese business women
- ➔ English for Star Wars Fans
- ➔ English for Historians
- ➔ English for 7 year olds
- ➔ English for teenagers
- ➔ English for retirees
- ➔ English for Tourists
- ➔ English for tourists in London

- ➔ Learn English through music
- ➔ Learn English through movies

I'm sure you could make up hundreds of more possible courses!

Free from the Tyranny of the Physical

Now, you might think that by offering a highly specific product, you're limiting the number of customers you might have. This would be a problem for a physical English school because its potential market is limited by geography, so it would be lucky to get any students in a course for, say, 'Medical English'. But the Online English Teacher is free from geographical restraints. We are free from 'the tyranny of the physical'. We have a potential market of billions of people. The market is big enough to offer highly specialized niche English courses.

So let's let the teachers bound to physical schools teach 'general English'. The Online English Teacher can be the specialists.

Choosing your niche

Do you have any specific skills or knowledge? Do you have a particular interest or passion? What's your employment background? What countries have you visited or lived in? Have you done anything outside teaching? Do you have any personal or professional contacts in a particular profession?

Do you know another language besides English? If you are reasonably fluent in another language, you can explain some of the finer points of English grammar to your student in their mother tongue. This is particularly useful for students in the early stages of learning English because not only does it make explaining things easier, it also saves lots of time. Even if you don't know much of another language, even a little will give you an understanding of some of the differences between English and your student's mother tongue. My very limited understanding of Russian is enough to know that because Russian doesn't use articles ('the' and 'a'), a Russian student is going to have difficulty understanding how to use articles properly.

Niche English teaching is a win-win-win.

- ➔ You win because you get paid more for your time.
- ➔ The student wins because they learn English that is specific to their needs.
- ➔ The teaching profession as a whole wins because, with more specialists, it becomes more professional and better paid.

Along with English for Specific Purposes, you should also consider two more highly lucrative areas for English teachers: test preparation and business English.

Exam Preparation

This is one of the most lucrative areas for the Online English teacher. Globalisation means that organisations such as multinational companies and universities need to ensure that their employees and students have a certain level of proficiency in the English language, something measurable according to internationally recognised criteria. This has led to a rapid expansion in the use of English language examinations, and it's big business. Many language schools offer courses to prepare students for taking these exams, sometimes charging thousands of pounds for intensive classroom-based courses; the Online English Teacher is, in fact, ideally placed to do this even better.

Now, you may not like tests, or teaching 'to the test', but for many students, the results they get on these tests can be life changing. They can determine whether or not they gain entry into university, whether or not they are granted work permits and visas to move to another country, and whether or not they climb the next rung on a career ladder in a multinational company. Exam preparation is therefore a high value product and consequently, students will pay large sums of money to ensure they get a good score on these tests.

There are a wide range of internationally recognised examinations for English. By far the most widely taken tests are:

IELTS: International English Language Testing System (pronounced 'eye-elts')

TOEFL: Test of English as a Foreign Language (pronounced 'toe-full')

TOEIC: Test of English for International Communication (pronounced 'toe-ick')

IELTS is an exam which many students from around the world need when applying for entrance to university in the UK and Australia, and also Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa and North America. A good IELTS score is essential for entry into one of these universities, so taking the exam is a potentially life changing event. We'll go into more detail on the IELTS in the chapter on exam preparation in part 2 of the book.

TOEFL is basically the US version of IELTS. Most US universities use TOEFL, but an increasing number are using IELTS.

TOEIC is an English language test designed specifically to measure the everyday English skills of people working in an international environment. It is very popular in Japan and parts of south-east Asia.

Other important, widely-recognised examinations administered by Cambridge English (an affiliate of Cambridge University) include First Certificate in English (FCE), an exam for students at an intermediate level, and Cambridge Advanced English (CAE), a qualification that's widely recognised by educational institutions, governments and businesses as a mark of an ability to use in English in advanced settings such as research.

One of the great advantages of preparing students for these tests is that there is a mine of information about them on the Internet, including preparation materials and sample exam papers. In effect, all the materials you'll ever need have been prepared for you. Your job is simply to support students as they tackle tough exam questions, give them feedback on their answers, explain to them how they can improve and give them practice developing the skills they will need to answer questions correctly.

There are also English exams related to business English, such as the BEC (Business English Certificate) and BULATS (Business Language Testing Service). The Business BULATS course is particularly popular in Japan; multinational companies will routinely ask job applicants there for their BULATS score. There are also examinations related to specific professions, such as the Test of Legal English Skills (TOCLES).

The range of English language exams is almost endless. You could even offer to prepare school students for national examinations in English. I prepare Russian students for the Russian state examination in English, which Russian school leavers have to take when they are 17. A good score on this exam is essential for entry into one of the top Russian universities.

All that it takes to become a specialist teacher for these exams is to download a few sample or past exam papers and try to do them yourself. During lessons you can work through the exam paper with your student. This has the added benefit of meaning you don't need any other materials, so you get higher rates of pay and need to spend less time preparing for a lesson. Many of these exams have lots of sample materials available for free.

Business English

Another lucrative area in which you can specialise is Business English. Any company that does business with customers or suppliers in another company is going to need people who can communicate in English, and because of globalisation there are lots of companies in this situation. The needs of business users of English can be quite specific. For example, they might need to:

- ➡ give presentations about products

- ➡ negotiate business deals

- ➡ show a visitor or a prospective employee around their office or factory
- ➡ engage in small talk at a business conference
- ➡ send and read emails
- ➡ deal with customer complaints

Business users of English need lots of vocabulary and functional language specific to their business sector. Again, the Online English Teacher is ideally placed to provide that product.

So decide what you are going to teach. Think about what you know, think about your experience and think about what you want to teach. Decide on your product, then offer it to the world!

Section 3

How to find students

The challenge of being able to find students is probably the main reason potential online English teachers never put their dreams into action. Getting hold of a laptop and installing Skype is easy, deciding what you're going to teach is straightforward once you know the possibilities, but....finding actual students. It seems a bit scary.

So let's cut the challenge down to a more manageable reality.

All you need is to find one student.

Yes, that's right. Just one! That's all you need to aim for, at least initially. Find one student. There are two reasons why you should think like this:

1. Once you've got an actual living, breathing student, then finding another one seems far, far easier. You've already been doing it successfully, so getting another one seems much more attainable.
2. If you do a good job, your student might recommend you to a friend, neighbour or relative. Suddenly, simply through word-of-mouth recommendation, you have another student.

In this chapter we're going to show you how to find students using a variety of different methods, some more effective than others, some more financially rewarding than others, but always keep in mind (if you're just starting out), that these methods are ways to get that first student. From that base camp, confidence and recommendations will get you more.

So, you've decided what to teach. You have a clear service to offer. It might be general English or conversational English, it might be the more lucrative areas of a niche area, test preparation or business English. Now, how is your student going to find you?

1. Word of mouth

The most powerful marketing tool is also one of the easiest to forget: word-of-mouth. Do you know anyone who wants to learn English, or do you know anyone who knows someone who wants to learn English? Now this is easier said than done, especially if you live in a country where English is the native language. So to an extent, it's a marketing strategy for those of you in

for the long haul, or if you happen to live in a country where there is a high demand for learning English.

There is one big advantage to teaching students who you reached through word-of-mouth referral: you can charge higher rates. Because you were recommended to them by someone they know, there is a much higher level of trust involved. You're not just some random teacher they found on the Internet, you're someone they know. This can alone double or triple the rates you can charge for your teaching.

Get the ball rolling by teaching face-to-face, then moving online

If you want to take a medium to long-term approach to building up an online student base through word of mouth, you could consider first of all living in a town or city where there is a demand for English language tutoring, teach them face-to-face and later switch to teaching them online. You could even get a job teaching English at a language school, which helps you build up experience and contacts. Many online English teachers have taken this route.

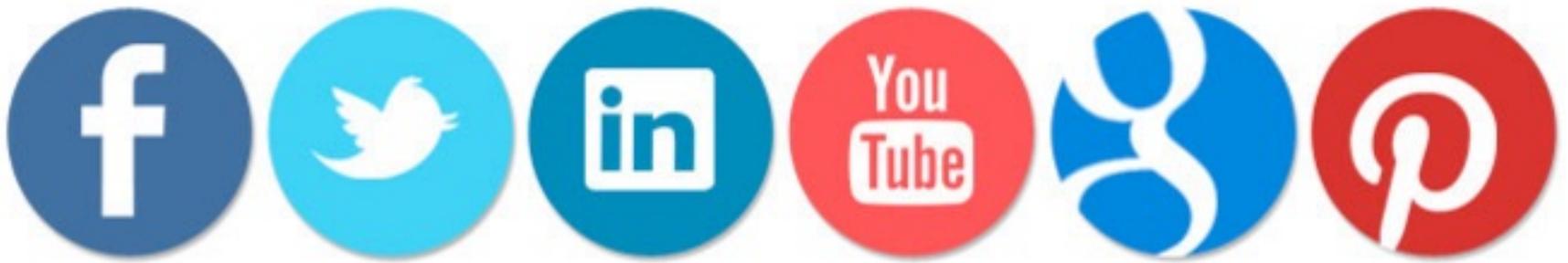
Of course, marketing through word of mouth isn't always the ideal solution to the life of an online English teacher. Fortunately, we now have an online version of word-of-mouth. It's called social networking.

2. Social Networks

While most people see social networks, like Facebook and Twitter, as a place to keep in touch with their friends, entrepreneurs and marketers see social networks as the place to market their products and services online. And you, the Online English Teacher, should take the same view. Now, we're not suggesting adding hundreds of friends and pushing your online teaching service to them. Rather, we're suggesting looking at social networks as a vehicle for marketing your teaching service through social media tools. This is known as social media marketing.

The core idea of social media marketing is that you establish a presence and get noticed by creating and sharing content with people who learn English. This could be in the form of posts, videos, blogs, or it could be contributions to discussions. You're basically using social media platforms, like Facebook and YouTube, as a way of helping English language learners; in return you get noticed and this can help you relationships with potential students.

Social media marketing can be quite time-consuming, though. However, if you are able to invest the time, the rewards can be great. If you're interested in finding students through this route, we've included a "Social Media Marketing 101" section later in this chapter. For now, we'll look at a third way of finding students, one which many online English teachers take when starting out.



3. Online marketplaces

Online marketplaces are websites where teachers can register and sell their teaching services, and where students can come and find a teacher. It's often the first place online English teachers go to when looking for students, but for some online teachers it's the only place they go. While they can be useful when starting out, it should not be your only source of students. Online marketplaces do tend to differ in terms of the price you can charge and how much commission the website itself makes.

Italki

Italki – www.italki.com - is one of the better online marketplaces. It is particularly popular amongst Chinese learners of English, a massive market for any online English teacher. Unlike some online marketplaces, teachers are free to set their prices and there is also a very active community amongst both students and teachers. In fact, contributing to forum discussions in which students are active is a very good way of promoting yourself as a teacher, so when choosing an online marketplace, always check to see whether or not it has a lively discussion forum.

There are two types of teacher on italki:

Professional Teachers: those who have formal teaching qualifications and teaching experience, and who can provide both professional lessons and informal conversation practice

Community Tutors: native or near-native speakers of English who do not have teaching certification, who can provide informal conversation practice.

To become a teacher on italki you need to go through a fairly painless application process which involves uploading any certification you might have along with details about yourself and your lessons, as well as an introductory video.

Italki is also useful as it provides, not only a way to connect teachers and students, but a booking system and a payment system. Students can also give their teachers a rating, a powerful recommendation (if you teach well!).

You can find more information about how to become a teacher on italki at teachers.italki.com .

Verbal Planet

Another marketplace for connecting teachers and students is Verbal Planet – www.verbalplanet.com. Like Italki, it's for teachers and students of any language. Teachers can sign up for a free account. To get listed on the marketplace, teachers need to upload a profile.

Google Helpouts

If you live in the USA, Canada, the UK, Ireland, Australia or New Zealand, Google Helpouts – helpouts.google.com - is a great way to find students. Launched in November 2013, it enables people to share any kind of expertise through live video to anyone seeking to learn that expertise. This includes learning English, and online English teachers are starting to use it to find new students. To use it, you need to create a listing, explaining what you're offering, any qualifications or experience and the price you charge for a lesson. You can set a schedule for students to book lessons through, and if you get a booking, you'll be notified through email or SMS. Payments are made by the student using Google Wallet. Eventually, Google Helpouts will be rolled out on a global basis.

The Downside of Online Marketplaces

I come from England but I live in Bangkok. Now, I used to think that English people were shopaholics, but when I came to Bangkok, I realized that Thais were in a completely different league. Not only does it have shopping malls seemingly on every street corner, but the pavements come alive with street markets when the sun goes down. These night markets are packed with stalls and heaving with shoppers. Personally, it's my idea of a living hell, but lots of Thais and tourists adore the night markets. The great thing about these market stalls is that the clothes, bags, shoes and random knick knacks they sell are cheap. To be frank, the stuff on one stall is pretty similar to the stuff on another stall, so the only way the hawkers on each stall can differentiate themselves from another is on price.

Online teacher marketplaces are a bit like Bangkok's night markets. Each teacher profile is like a market stall with each teacher selling his or her products. If teachers are broadly selling the same products, such as 'general English' or 'conversational English', the prices they can expect for these products is going to be low.

Look at it from the student's (the customer's) point of view. They come to an online marketplace looking for an English teacher and they find thousands to choose from. How do they differentiate between this vast selection? One way is to read the blurb about each teacher, but who has the time to read through thousands of these? Another way is to check out the teacher's profile photo. Does the teacher look professional, do they look fun, or do they look like a slob or a drunk? But of course, photos can lie; after all, you can't judge a book by its cover. So students are often left with only one choice: to differentiate between teachers on price.

Teachers, being teachers and not marketing experts, think this means the only way to get students is to undercut the prices charged by other teachers. This means that rates of pay are driven relentlessly lower until online English teachers are being paid less than high school dropouts flipping burgers.

This is why we made an argument for offering niche teaching, exam preparation lessons and business English lessons in the previous chapter: add value to your product instead of cutting prices. This is also why we would suggest using word of mouth and social networking as your main marketing tools. Online marketplaces are certainly a good option if you're just starting out because using word of mouth and social media can take time to deliver, but they're not the best place if you want the best rates of pay.

4. Online Schools

There are also a growing number of online schools appearing on the Internet. These schools essentially give you the students, so you don't need to spend any time marketing yourself, and they will sometimes give you the materials you need to teach the lessons. For people starting out as online English teachers, or for people who just want to make a little extra money working from home (for example mums with young children), they're not an entirely bad idea, but they tend to pay poorly as well, often in the range of \$5 to \$15 an hour. If you live somewhere where the cost of living is low, the Philippines for example, it might be a viable option for supplementing your income, but for most of us you can get better pay and conditions, perhaps with employment benefits, by working for a physical school.

Social Media Marketing 101

As promised, here is our crash course in using social media to find students, something known as social media marketing. When entrepreneurs think about how social networks can help them market their products and services, they talk about social media marketing. Social media marketing is all about connecting, interacting and contributing. It's not about free advertising or shoving something in people's faces. It's all about putting out useful, interesting and entertaining content that helps you build a relationship with potential customers. Here's how you go about it.

1. Create a Website

The first thing you should do is to create a simple website. This will form the hub of your marketing strategy. On your site you can post articles about learning English that will appeal to people who want to learn English – your potential customers. You can either create your own posts or re-use content that other people have created, something known as curating. Creating content is all about you writing great articles or making great videos. Curating content is all about you finding great articles or videos, and enhancing this content in some way, perhaps by writing a short review about the article.

Make regular posts, at least once a week. You could include videos explaining a grammatical feature, or typical errors students make; tips for doing well in the IELTS exam; a conversational dialogue. If you're good at drawing, create a cartoon strip. There really is no limit to what you could do; just make it useful and interesting to English language learners. Good content marks you out as an expert. Your site is where potential students come to find out more about you and to get more information and tips on learning English. This is also where they can find out about your lessons and where they can contact you.

We'd recommend using WordPress – wordpress.com - to create a blog because it's free and simple to use, and with great support. We would also strongly recommend making your website as visually appealing as you can, by including video and also good-looking photographs and graphics. Try to create some infographics to illustrate what you are trying to say: you can create great looking infographics for free at piktochart.com, easel.ly and venngage.com.

Now, not everyone has the time or skills to set up a website. Fortunately, you can get people to do this for you; you can even get people to post content to the site for you! Check out websites like freelancer.com and fiverr.com to find people who can do the hard, time-consuming work for you, for amazingly small fees.

2. Create a Facebook Page

Of course, a great website is no good without an audience. This is where social media comes to the rescue. The purpose of using social media is simply to drive people to your website so that

more people will come to visit your site: more visitors = more potential students = more paying students.

There are lots of social media sites out there but it's best to focus on just one to begin with, ideally the social media site where your target students will be. This almost certainly means Facebook™. At the time of writing, Facebook had 1.2 billion monthly active users with almost half of these using Facebook every day. Regular users of the service can spend several hours a day on the site, checking out not just their friends' pages but pages of things they are interested in: this might be pages about their favourite football club or favourite singer, or pages related to their hobbies and interests.

It's easy to create a page for your online teaching lessons. Look for the 'create page' link under your pages feed and follow the instructions. Once your page is set up, you need to start making regular posts to it or people won't bother 'liking' it. Whenever you make a new post on your website, make a short post on your Facebook page that links to it. You can also make posts that link to other good content on the Internet as this will give people more reason to like your Facebook page and visit it.

Now, most students looking for English teachers will search for English teachers via Google. Google loves Facebook, so any English teachers with a Facebook page will have a reasonable chance of appearing high in the Google search results, especially if you include keywords related to what you're teaching, and especially if it's something highly specific like IELTS, TOEIC or TOEFL (another reason why doing exam prep is so lucrative – the acronyms work as excellent search keywords!).

3. Building a profile using other social media sites

Of course, while Facebook may be the biggest social media site, it is far from being the only one. Eventually, you may want to expand your social media marketing work into other social media sites, finding new markets for your teaching. LinkedIn™ is the platform of choice for placing a professional profile. And it's massive, with almost 200 million monthly active users around the world. Google+™, with 327 million monthly active users, is expanding rapidly. And Twitter™ is also vastly popular. Image-based social media sites, such as Pinterest™, are also rapidly becoming popular, especially amongst young women.

While these sites are massively popular all over the world, including in such markets as Latin America and South East Asia, many parts of the world have social media networks specific to their region and language. These should also be regarded as ideal places to market yourself as an online English teacher, because these are the places where millions of people who don't speak English tend to go.

China and Japan

China and Japan have been massive markets for English teachers for many years, and they have their own popular social media and social networking sites. The biggest social networking site in Japan is Mixi™ - mixi.jp - but even this is dwarfed by Chinese social networks; according to surveys, four of the twelve most popular social networks in the world are based in China. Popular social networks in China include:

Qzone™ qzone.qq.com is the most popular social networking site in China, surpassing even Facebook. At the time of writing it had 712 million total users, with 150 million of them updating their profile page at least once a month.

Sina Weibo™ - weibo.com - is a social networking and microblogging site, with just over half a billion monthly active users. About 100 million messages are posted on Weibo every day.

Renren™ - www.renren.com - is particularly popular amongst Chinese college students

Incidentally, English language learners from China and Japan, as well as South Korea, are currently amongst the most comfortable with the idea of online learning, so they are a good market to aim for.

Russia and Ukraine

Russia and Ukraine (and, also, many countries of the former Soviet Union, including oil rich Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan) are big markets for learning English. The most popular Russian language social network there is **vkontakte™** - vk.com. Vkontakte is often referred to as the Russian Facebook which, if you take a quick look at it, is understandable. Creating a page on vkontakte is also almost exactly the same as creating a page on Facebook, so if you want to go after the growing Russian market, take a look at VK.

YouTube

You could also create a YouTube Channel and make some videos giving students tips for learning English, or explaining tricky words or grammar. You could make videos on your webcam or phone and upload them to YouTube. These can also be embedded in your website or Facebook via YouTube. Just as Google search loves Facebook, it also loves YouTube!

Pinterest

You can also make use of Pinterest, an image-based social network. It has over 50 million monthly active users, mostly in the USA, but it is growing in popularity and has considerable

potential as a social media marketing platform. Pinterest users create online 'pinboards' around a project, interest or hobby and 'pin' content found on the Internet to their pinboards, such as videos, and web pages. These pins are displayed as an image, usually taken from the website the pin is linked to. So, if you are about to get married, you might create a pinboard about weddings, and pin content from all over the Internet related to wedding dresses, wedding cakes, honeymoons and so on. If you're interested in pedigree cats, you would create a board for that and pin content from all over the Internet to that board. If you're interested in learning English, you would do the same, adding content you find about irregular verbs, language for giving presentations, YouTube videos, and so on. This makes Pinterest a very useful curation tool. So far, it probably sounds like a way of bookmarking sites, but then you add in the social networking element. People can search for and check out other people's pinboards on similar topics to theirs, make comments about it, repin content to their own boards and share any good content they've found to other social networks, including Facebook. This has the effect of quickly spreading good content on specific topics through several social networks. What's more, if you click on an interesting pin and decide you want to see more, you can visit the website linked to the pin. Pinterest is currently driving millions of people to websites all over the Internet, so take a look at it.

4. Contribute

Social media marketing is also about contributing to things other people are saying. Find Facebook pages and pages on other social media sites related to learning English, as well as discussion forums around the Web, and contribute to discussions there. But include a link back to your website - on Facebook this is easy: simply post your comment using your Facebook page name rather than your personal name.

For example, IELTS has its own official Facebook page, with 1.6 million likes, meaning 1.6 million users (that's 1 in every 750 registered users of Facebook) get regular newsfeeds from the page. The IELTS organisation makes regular posts to the page, which are often based around tricky exam questions; students who read the posts try to answer the question or discuss why they may have got it wrong. There's nothing to stop teachers from contributing their own thoughtful posts to the discussion. But why not create your own IELTS exam page, if that's where you want to specialise.

Social media marketing is all about creation, curation interaction and contribution

To conclude, social networks and social media are great places to raise your profile as an online English teacher, but remember that they are platforms for interacting with others and contributing: adding great content, getting involved in discussions, connecting with your potential learners and fellow teachers. Creating a Facebook page or a Pinterest pinboard and

then sitting back will not be enough. You need go to the parts of social networks where your potential students go. Go where learners seek out content and where they engage in discussions. There are many pages on Facebook for this, many feeds on Twitter. There are also social networking-style sites specifically for language learners, such as Italki, which includes discussion forums frequented by both teachers and students who discuss their successes and challenges learning languages of all kinds.

Social media marketing is a large and ever expanding area, as new social networks spring up, and it's easy to get sucked into it. We've included a lot of ideas here, but start gradually. Step one should be to create a website and add a little bit of content to it, maybe a video, maybe even a link to someone's else's material. It can take a large investment in time, but it is a good way of finding students as well as being a great way to develop your own skills and knowledge as a teacher. It's also great fun!

Section 4

What to charge and how to get paid

One of the most important questions raised by new online English teachers is how much they should ask for their lessons. There is no one simple answer to this, but you should stick to one golden rule: don't undervalue yourself. Remember that as an English teacher, you are offering something very valuable. English is not a hobby or a thing you might play with and discard after a few months; it's a lifelong, life-changing skill.

One thing that teachers often forget is that not everyone is as badly paid as a classroom teacher - there are lots of people out there with money to burn who will happily part with big wads of cash in return for being able to communicate better in English. It's all about finding those people.

How much you can charge for your teaching time can vary a lot. It depends on what you teach. Because general English and conversational English are less specialised, expect to get paid less than if you were offering business English, English for Specific Purposes (such as legal English) or exam preparation.

It also depends on how your student found you. If you were recommended to someone by word-of-mouth, you can expect to be paid higher rates than if they found you on an online marketplace like Italki where you are just one person in a large crowd. On Italki, certified teachers generally charge around \$15-\$20 an hour.

So, while we can't offer a simple answer to this question, we can suggest some key tips:

Charge in advance and offer discounts

Charge students for blocks of lessons, say, 10 or 20 lessons at a time. This will get students into the habit of coming back to you again and again, meaning they are more likely to stick with you in the long term. In return you can offer them a discount of, perhaps, 5% on these lessons. This also means you get a nice lump sum before you have taught anything.

Charge for 'courses', not 'lessons'

Another way of encouraging students to pay for blocks of lessons in advance is by offering courses of, say, 10 or 20 lessons, at the end of which students will have reached some kind of end point. This is particularly useful when doing exam preparation courses. When offering exam prep courses, we usually offer 30 hour or 60 hour courses. You could also offer 10 hour courses

helping students prepare for a holiday abroad, or a 20 hour course giving business presentations.

Give them extra time for free

Even though you might be charging for an hour, it's a good idea to give your student an extra 5 or 10 minutes for free. People like getting something for nothing.

Have a cancellation policy

Sometimes lessons need to be cancelled, but your time is precious and you don't want to waste time sitting at your computer at the pre-arranged time only to find that your student doesn't turn up. Make your cancellation policy clear to your student at the outset. A typical cancellation policy would expect students to cancel at least 24 hours in advance, otherwise they lose their money (another reason why it's a good idea to charge for lessons in advance). Having said that, I've found that students cancel lessons far less often when taking online lessons than when doing lessons in a classroom or with a physical one-to-one teacher.

Charge in Dollars

It's also a good idea to set your prices in a strong currency, such as the dollar, regardless of where you or your student lives. If the currency in your student's currency takes a sudden dive, then you are insulated against this. I learned this the hard way: I used to charge my Russian students in roubles, but during 2014 the Russian rouble started to plummet in value because of the conflict in Ukraine and the fall in the global oil price. Every week, I was getting less and less for my lessons, so I asked them to pay in dollars instead. If you receive payment through an online payment gateway like PayPal, this is easy to do. Which brings us on to how to actually get paid.

How to get paid

You can only accept payments from debit and credit cards if you have a merchant account. So for most of us that means we need a third party to process payments for us (and they inevitably take a cut of the earnings).

PayPal

www.paypal.com

PayPal is the obvious choice for receiving payments; it has been around for a long time and is widely known and used. Most online teachers use it as their payment gateway. It's simple to use and you can add a payment button on your website which makes it easy for your student to pay. To pay you using PayPal, your student (or their parents) needs to associate a credit card with their PayPal account; when they pay you, PayPal simply debits their card and drops the

payment into your PayPal account. PayPal typically charge around 2.9% + \$0.30 for every transaction, but withdrawing to your bank account is free. One big advantage of PayPal for the Online English Teacher is the fact that it's available in lots of countries: 203 at the time of writing, something a lot of other payment sites can't claim.

Google Wallet

www.google.com/wallet

Google Wallet is Google's answer to PayPal. You need to sign up for a Google Wallet Merchant Account, add a payment button to your website and you can start receiving payments.

Western Union

www.westernunion.com

You can also receive payment via Western Union. With Western Union, students can pay with cash by going to a Western Union agent in their locality; there are over half a million of them around the world, often found in local post offices, supermarkets and banks. In some countries they can make the payment online using a card. You can collect the money, usually within minutes, at a Western Union agent in your country, or they can send the money straight to your bank account (available in many, but not all, countries). In some countries, including the Philippines, Tanzania, Kenya and Indonesia, you can receive money on your mobile phone if your carrier supports it (for example, in the Philippines you'd need to be using Smart or Globe). Check the Western Union website for more details. While Western Union is ideal for those students without a credit or debit card, or a bank account, the fees charged by Western Union tend to be higher than with PayPal.

Bank Transfers

The slow method is to simply give your student your bank account number so they can transfer funds to your bank account. This usually takes a few days and incurs bank charges as well as being subject to currency fluctuations.

Section 5

Where to work from

One of the great things about teaching English online is that you can do it anywhere, assuming you have a fast and reliable Internet connection.

So you can work from home if you want to, a huge benefit to people looking after young children or elderly parents, or for people who simply wish to roll out of bed straight into 'work'. You can work in a café, on the proviso that your Internet speed is good enough. This sure beats working in a classroom!

You can teach students while taking a holiday somewhere, perhaps by doing an hour's lesson from your hotel room before going out and hitting the streets or the beaches. Mixing work and pleasure isn't to everyone's taste, but teaching online is actually a fantastic way of funding your travels around the world.

Location independence also has another major advantage. It means you can take advantage of differences in living costs around the world: you can live where living costs are low, while teaching students from places where living costs (and therefore rates of pay) are high.

For example, you could live in Bangkok where people can live very comfortably on £1000 a month, while teaching students from Japan and Russia where students expect to pay comparatively high rates for tutoring. It means you can get Moscow and Tokyo rates of pay while spending at the Bangkok cost of living.

Teaching English Online means you are freed from the tyranny of the physical. You can live where living costs are low, and teach students living in cities where rates of pay for English teachers are high.

Of course, you need to live where the infrastructure supports online teaching, so a country with slow Internet and regular power cuts is a non-starter. You also want to live where the lifestyle is pleasant. Here are a few ideas.

Countries with a low cost of living and a 'good enough' infrastructure include: Thailand, Cambodia, The Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, Costa Rica, Bolivia, Colombia.

Countries that typically pay high rates for English tutoring include: Russia, South Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia.

Thailand is a great base for the Online English Teacher for several reasons: it has a standard of living not too far removed from western standards of living (Starbucks, 711s, ATMs and shopping malls are everywhere in Bangkok, along with good quality, affordable health care); good WiFi can be found fairly easily in the big cities, although you usually have to pay for it; the country has a pleasant climate, great beaches and mountains, wonderful people and delicious, cheap food. Not surprisingly, Thailand is home to lots of online workers, including online teachers, especially in Bangkok and Chiang Mai.

Part 2

How to teach English

Section 1

How languages are learned

Assuming you can drive, do you remember how you learned to drive? Or to swim? Or to play a musical instrument like the guitar? Or to cook? If you're anything like me, you learned to drive a car by getting into a car and trying to drive it. Or you learned to swim by getting into a swimming pool and trying to swim. Or you learned the guitar by strumming the strings. Or you learned to cook by cooking. And every time, alongside you, was an expert: a driving instructor, a swimming instructor, a guitar teacher, a cooking teacher. Someone who could not only do these things themselves, but could tell you when you were doing things right or wrong, and, crucially, could explain to you or show you the right way to do these things. And if they were really good, they made the learning process 'just hard enough' so you were always learning new things: so a good swimming instructor first got you to float, then kick your legs, then do the breaststroke; they didn't start off by getting you to do the butterfly.

It's the same with English. Simply put, people learn English by using it. You learn to speak English by speaking English; you learn to write in English by writing in English; you learn to understand written and spoken English by reading and listening to English and trying to understand it. It's possible to learn English without a teacher, and many people do, but the process can be painfully slow and strewn with mistakes. Imagine trying to learn to drive a car without a driving instructor! It would be a process of trial and error, with probably a lot of dents along the way. So a teacher is essential if the learner wants to make the most effective use of their time.

The role of the English teacher, then, is essentially the same as the swimming instructor or the driving instructor, or a mother teaching her child how to walk:

- ➔ To create opportunities for the learner to use English
- ➔ To ensure those opportunities are 'just hard enough'

To provide feedback so that the learner knows when they are doing things right, when they are doing things wrong, and how to correct themselves

Section 2 of our book explains how to do this by giving you tips and advice for teaching the four language skills online: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Then we will explain how to teach

vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation online. Finally, we will conclude with a chapter on how to do the lucrative area of exam preparation with online students. But before you do any teaching, it's vital you have a good understanding of what your student wants and needs from their English lessons with you, and so we'll begin this section with some tips and ideas for doing what teachers call a needs analysis.

Section 2

How to do a needs analysis

In section one, we talked about what you are going to teach your students. If you're going to teach something very specific like IELTS test preparation, or Legal English, then you already have a fairly clear idea of what you're going to teach. However, you might not be all that clear about what your student knows already and how much they can already do. The question of what you are going to teach is even more complicated for those teaching general English or conversational English, meaning that when you first sit down and try to think what to do in a lesson, you can feel pretty overwhelmed.

This is where a needs analysis comes in. A needs analysis is all about finding out as much as you can about your student, so that your lessons with them can be as productive as possible. There are three big areas worth asking your student about.

1. Wants

What does your student want to do with the English language, now and in the future? This can easily be overlooked, but is probably the most important of the three areas. English lets people communicate. It's a tool. So what does your student want to do with this amazing tool we call English? Here are a few common uses:

- ➡ to pass an exam
- ➡ to watch and understand Hollywood movies
- ➡ to read books in English for pleasure
- ➡ to do business deals
- ➡ to study at an international school or university
- ➡ to find or get on better with an English-speaking lover
- ➡ to get a job as a nurse or doctor in a hospital in an English-speaking country
- ➡ to help bring about world peace
- ➡ to read academic journals

➔ to understand lectures at an international medical conference

➔ to communicate with the players on your football team

I'm sure you can think of many more! It's good to know what your student wants to do with English, because then you have a better idea of what your student wants out of their lessons with you. That way, you can give students opportunities to practise what they want to do. If they want English to be able to visit London as a tourist, give them opportunities to ask for directions, order tickets and listen to descriptions of the Tower of London. If they want to take the IELTS, do IELTS practice questions. If they want to use English to give business presentations, give them practice doing that. If you give your student what they want, then they'll keep coming back to you for more. So find out what your student wants to do with English, and help them find their voice.

For school-age students, a student's wants can be a little more tricky to ascertain. After all, they're probably doing English with you because it's what their parents want, not what they want. The next two areas of a needs analysis can help here, as well as giving you a more detailed picture of adults learners too.

2. Needs

What can your student already do with the English language, and where do they need to improve? What are their strengths and weaknesses? How proficient are they in speaking, in reading, in listening and in writing? What's their pronunciation like? Do they have an extensive vocabulary, or is it very limited?

Knowing what your student can and can't do means you can focus on those areas that need the most help, and, in fact, it's quite common for students to be weaker in some areas than others. I've often found that school-age students in Thailand and Russia have a good understanding of grammar, as well as good skills in reading and writing English, but are much weaker when it comes to listening and speaking. This is because any English language lessons they take in school are more likely to focus on grammar, reading and writing, rather than speaking and listening. So our lesson time together is therefore better spent on activities designed to improve their speaking and listening skills.

It's also useful to know what level your student is at in relation to some of the common benchmarks used in the English teaching industry because most materials and coursebooks (if you choose to use these) are labelled according to these benchmarks.

One such benchmark is the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, better known as the CEFR. The CEFR is a list of 'can-do' statements against which you can assess

your students. These descriptions can help you pinpoint your student's proficiency level, and help you decide on suitable materials for them. You can find some 'can-do' statements from the CEFR on our companion website.

A more traditional benchmark used to describe the difficulty of materials is the use of names to describe different proficiency levels. The most commonly used proficiency levels, along with their CEFR equivalents are:

3. Interests

It's also useful to find out what your student is interested in, because then you also get to find out what they like to talk about, to read about, to write about or to listen to. If you can bring their interests into a lesson, your student will be much more motivated to use English, especially if you are teaching teenagers. So find out about your student's hobbies and what they like to do in their free time. Find out about their ambitions, the kind of TV programmes they watch and the kind of books they like to read. Hobbies and interests are a potential gold mine of language. If your student loves football, it's usually not difficult to get them talking about it. I had a student who was mad about football and our lessons during the last World Cup pretty much involved me sitting back and letting him talk...and talk...and talk. I occasionally asked him questions about the World Cup to keep the conversation moving into new areas, or I gave him words and phrases to help him say things when he got stuck, but these were the easiest lessons I've ever had.

In summary, then, a needs analysis is useful because it doesn't just help you to make your lessons more relevant to your student, it can often make your job of preparing lessons a whole lot easier because you know where to start.

How to do a Needs Analysis

The two most commonly used ways to do a needs analysis are to ask your student to complete a questionnaire, or simply interview your student. We've included a needs analysis questionnaire on our companion website, theonlineenglishteacher.com. You can either give this to your student to complete or use the questions as the basis for an interview.

Section 3

How to teach speaking

When learning any new language, undoubtedly the most fun, motivating and rewarding area is speaking. As a teacher of English online, you will most likely find that most of your students want to speak, rather than read, write or listen. This speaking may be anything from an informal chat about their day at work, to a presentation they have to give at university the next day. For the learner, the classroom is their safe haven for making mistakes. This is the place where they will feel comfortable practising new words, venturing new topics, testing the cultural boundaries of a foreign person and simply making mistakes. Therefore, it is our job as the language teacher to create this safe environment for the learners to work in.

The teacher or the facilitator?

Think back to your days at school, when you were sitting in the classroom staring at your teacher, doodling in your notebook. The likelihood is that your teacher was doing most of the speaking and you sat there listening. This may be appropriate for a middle grade science lesson, but we are here to help our learners with the skill of speaking, and the only way to do this is by getting them to speak. There are countless times I can mention when I have been sitting in a coffee shop, and next to me is an English student and her private tutor. The tutor is telling the student all about his experiences in Japan and his family back in the UK and his dog and his gerbil and anything else he can think of, whilst his student sits, smiles, nods, and sips her coffee. The student may be happy to listen but is she learning?

Getting used to the silence

So we do not want to 'be' the conversation, we want to start it and then keep it going. Look at this conversation:

Teacher So, what did you do before the lesson today Yumi?

Yumi I go shopping.

Teacher OK, do you like shopping?

Yumi Yes.

Teacher So do I. I go shopping at the mall nearly every week. Actually, I have to buy my mother a birthday present soon.

Yumi Your mother...

Teacher Yes, my mum's birthday is soon, I always call her on her birthday and we talk for hours. She really misses me because I live so far away...

Who is speaking in the conversation above? Yumi or her teacher? As an online language teacher we must get used to being the prompter in a conversation, pushing the learner to give us more information.

Look at another, similar conversation:

Teacher So, what did you do before the lesson today Yumi?

Yumi I go shopping.

Teacher Ah, you went shopping? Where do you like to go shopping?

Yumi I like to go shopping in the mall.

Teacher Why do you like the mall more than a market?

Yumi The mall is bigger and I like the air-conditioning.

Teacher Would you like to work in a mall?

Yumi Yes!

Teacher Why?

Notice here then that the teacher keeps prompting his student to talk by using questions. Let's look back at both conversations once more in a little more detail. Notice in the first conversation the teacher asks 'Do you like shopping?' while in the second conversation he asks the question 'Where do you like to go shopping?'

The first question requires Yumi to give a one-word answer 'yes' whereas the question in the second conversation asks Yumi to give more information e.g. 'I like to go shopping in the mall'. Using open questions like this can really help the learner to extend their responses therefore increasing their talking time during the lesson and challenging them to create longer sentences.

As we have seen, one way of prompting is asking questions, but another even easier way is by doing nothing at all! Language learners need time to formulate their responses, thinking time. As

a teacher, you must get used to the 'uncomfortable silence' that presents itself when your student is thinking about what to say next. Look at the following example of a new teacher with her student:

Grace I like to play badminton. I... um... ...
Teacher Do you like to play with your friends?
Grace I like to ... erm
Teacher I love badminton, it's a great sport. I usually play it in the afternoon.

Now look at this next conversation between a slightly more experienced teacher and her student:

Gabrielle I... sometimes... go to shopping... with...
Teacher aha... (*nodding*)
Gabrielle with... my friend at the erm...
Teacher yes...
Gabrielle at the...
Teacher ...
Gabrielle weekend.

Notice that in the first conversation, the teacher feels uncomfortable and fills the awkward gap with her own ideas, whereas in the second conversation the teacher feels confident enough to allow her student the time to formulate her sentence. This ability to sit through silences and be patient is one of the most valuable tools you will require as an online teacher of English.

Fluency versus accuracy

So, here I am listening contentedly to my student, who is now feeling comfortable enough to tell me in detail about his date that went wrong last night. The problem is, I'm having a very hard time understanding him because of all the mistakes he keeps making! What do I do? Stop him? Correct him? Let him carry on?

Actually, in answer to the question above, all of them. As the teacher we must decide why the learner is speaking before they have even started. Are they speaking to improve the speed and fluency of their English; to practice some grammar they have learned; to ease their nerves a little at the beginning of the lesson; to describe the meaning of a word? Or something else?

Let's imagine that we want our student to improve her fluency. Then in theory, we need the student to practice speaking fluently, thus not interrupting at all, only to prompt the continuation

of their speaking as discussed before. As you gain confidence, allow the learner to continue speaking while you listen and note down both mistakes they are making as well as examples of good language they are using. (One advantage The Online English teacher over a face-to-face teacher is that we can do this out of sight of the webcam, so it doesn't unnerve or distract the learner). When they have finished speaking, this is your chance to review what they said and go through any errors that you feel are appropriate to cover while also praising the good language they used. Do remember not to be too fierce with your feedback and give a balance of both positive and negative feedback; our learners can be very sensitive and praising can do wonders for confidence and motivation.

If your focus is on the accuracy of your learner's English, for example you have just learned some new words and now the learner is going to try and use them, maybe it would be appropriate to stop the student and have them try the sentence again. If you need to correct a student, remember to do it in the most positive way possible and allow the learner themselves to try and correct the mistakes before you do. This gives the learner a much higher sense of achievement thus increasing their motivation. Look at the scenario below;

Gabrielle: I like play internet at weekend
Teacher: Not, I 'play' internet, but I 'use' the internet
Gabrielle: I see. I like to use the internet at the weekend...

Notice above that the teacher stops Gabrielle, corrects her mistake and then allows Gabrielle to re-formulate her sentence. Now look at the example below:

Gabrielle I like play internet at weekend
Teacher Do we 'play' the internet Gabrielle? What other way can I say this?
Gabrielle I do the internet? Oh, I use the internet!
Teacher Well done! Please continue from the beginning.

Notice that the teacher helps Gabrielle to recall the correct answer herself. This is a great way to help your learners and should be adopted whenever it is possible to do so.

Starting your lesson with meaningful small talk

I have seen many lessons taught by other teachers during my career and one of the biggest mistakes I have seen is their neglect towards the initial small talk at the beginning of a lesson. To many teachers, this feels like a waste of time, they think 'why waste ten minutes of a one hour lesson on nothing?' Students are then thrown into difficult discussions and exercises without

any time to breathe. Learning a language is like going to the gym, we need to stretch first. The learner needs time to warm up and get their brains and their tongues switched into a different way of working. Some teachers like to play little games at the beginning of a class which works great when we have many students, but as an online tutor, your best course of action will be to simply ask the student what they have been doing this week. Show interest in what they are saying and allow them to speak without fear of making mistakes. If you find that a student comes back to you regularly, try and keep this section of the lesson the same, so the student feels confident coming into the lesson. Below are some questions to get you through those first five to ten minutes;

- ➔ What did you do before the lesson today?
- ➔ What have you been doing this week?
- ➔ You sound happy today, what did you do?
- ➔ Have you read the news today? What do you think about...?
- ➔ Did you watch ... on TV last night? What did you think about it?
- ➔ What's the weather like there?
- ➔ How was school today? Did you have any exams?
- ➔ Have you been shopping in the last week? What did you buy?

Remember to keep prompting your student to continue and keep the conversation as natural as possible. Do not worry about stopping your student if time becomes short. From this speaking activity, lead them into the lesson. Remember, unless your learner has stipulated that they want to just talk about their week with you in their needs analysis, you must try and have a clear aim for your lesson and not just chat your way through it.

Open conversation

You will find as an online teacher, many students will want to just practice speaking with you. This is very understandable and acceptable. Remember, your student's only exposure to your language may be you! So, that one or two hours a week are valuable.

Many teachers assume that open conversation lessons are the golden ticket in the language-teaching world but I beg to differ. Open conversation lessons can become very rigid, unnatural, difficult to execute, and both unfulfilling for the learner and the teacher. And keeping a conversation going for a whole hour can also be very hard work!

Many years ago I taught a lady from Japan who wanted nothing but open conversation. We had an hour's lesson a week and we talked about her garden. She came every week minus a few holidays, so in my estimation we must have spent about 45 hours a year talking about her garden. This happened because this is what I thought she wanted to talk about, and she talked about it because she thought that was what I wanted to do. Big mistake! I remember the painful moments each week before the lesson began. If your student does want to have open conversation lessons, then set some boundaries right at the beginning, for example:

- ➔ The student will bring in a topic each week to talk about.
- ➔ The student will read a news article each week and discuss it with you.
- ➔ The teacher will bring a topic to the lesson each week.
- ➔ The student will mail a topic to the teacher in advance so the teacher can prepare questions for the topic.
- ➔ 30 minutes of the lesson each week will be devoted to open conversation and the other 30 minutes will be structured.

I have found in my own personal experience that knowing the topic before the lesson can help you to get some questions or talking points written down. I recently had an open conversation lesson on the topic of houses. My notes looked a little like this;

Furniture – describe your own house/ what furniture is in your house? Why did you choose it? If you could throw away one item, which would it be?

Style – Is it important to think about the style of your house? Do different colours have different effects? What colour would you paint your dream house and why?

The Future – What will houses look like in the future? Can you describe a house in 1000 years? Do people want to live in bigger or smaller houses?

The Past – Can you describe what houses looked like in your culture in the past? Why have they changed so much?

Famous people – Where do the famous people live in your country? Why?

Different cultures – What do...?

As you can see, with a little preparation, we can be very ready for any topic. Try doing this yourself. Choose a topic from one of these below and see if you can extend them like the topic of houses above.

Family, friends, shopping, sport, education, cities, culture, celebrities, restaurants, transport, food, nature, photography.

Speaking tasks

Sometimes it is not enough to just ask our learners questions. Sometimes we want their speaking to reflect something they have learned or practice something they are currently learning. For aims like these, we can set up actual speaking tasks. Below are some tasks that are widely used by language teachers both online and in the classroom.

Ranking

For a typical ranking task you will present your learners with several options such as 5 supermarkets, 10 different animals, three restaurants and so on. Then it is the student's job to organize these into an order such as preference or price or anything else you can think of.

For example, you could ask your student to rank Italian food, Spanish food, Chinese food, English food, Thai food from most delicious to least delicious, and then ask them to explain the reasons for their choice.

In this exercise, if the learner wants to successfully tell you why they have made these preferences they will have to use language to give opinions such as 'I think... in my opinion... I believe' and comparative language such as 'Italian food is fresher than English food but Thai food is spicier'. Notice how setting a task such as this, pushes our learners to express themselves in specific ways in the language. Setting tasks like this can really help with specific language points.

Pictures, pictures and more pictures

You will find that one of the best resources you have as a teacher will be pictures. They are easy to find, and there are many different ways you can use them. Do be careful of copyright laws when using images, one source to consider when using images may be Wikimedia Commons - commons.wikimedia.org. Now pick up a magazine or newspaper sitting near you and choose a photo. Can you think of some ways to use the picture in class?

Describing a picture: Let's imagine you are studying language connected with buildings e.g. tall, modern, big windows, elevator, revolving doors etc. Take a photo of a building and describe it to your student without them being able to see the picture and ask them to draw what they hear. When you have finished, show the student the image. Did they draw it correctly? Now change

roles and allow you student to describe a picture while you draw it. This can be played with any picture, and is a great way of practicing description.

Freeze frame! In this activity, you will give your student a picture and ask them to tell you what they see. Allow your student plenty of time do this. When they have finished, ask them to describe what happened next and what happened before the picture was taken. The student will basically be creating a story. This activity can be a spoken or written activity and can be very fun and motivating for your learner.

Role-play

This is the classic speaking practice tool. Role-plays are a great way to practice actual situations your student may come across in their new language. So what kind of situations could we role-play? Have a look at the list below and try and add to it:

- ➔ Buying a train ticket
- ➔ Checking into a hotel
- ➔ Talking to a doctor
- ➔ Complaining about food in a restaurant
- ➔ Calling a cinema to check times

As you can probably see, this list could go on for quite some time. Role-plays overcome the problems with open conversation classes because they push your student to use language related to different situations and will widen your student's experience in English without ever having to leave the virtual classroom. So how do we set up a role-play?

Ideally, find an example of the kind of conversation you want to practise with your student. Have a look on YouTube or the British Council's website. If you have access to coursebooks, do they include audio recordings of this kind of conversation. Alternatively, write your own conversation and practise saying this with your student. You can use these conversations as models for your role play later in the lesson.

Think about the kind of language the student will need to complete the task. So for example, if the role-play is a customer calling a cinema to buy tickets, think about the kind of language the student will need to do this. If you were able to find an audio recording of this, what language did the speakers use? If you wrote your own conversation, what language did you include? For this particular conversation, your learner may require language such as:

- ➔ What movies are showing tonight?

- ➔ What time does _____ start?
- ➔ What time is the first/last showing?
- ➔ Can I pay by credit card?
- ➔ Can I have a seat near the back?

Once you have drawn your student's attention to this language and practiced (see the chapters on vocabulary and grammar for more details), you are ready to begin your role-play. Look at the teachers instructions below:

Teacher OK, Yoko. I'm an assistant at the cinema, you are a customer, I want you to buy a ticket.
 Go!

Yoko ano, er, I... erm... Can I...

Teacher Yes, ABC cinema, how can I help you?

Yoko erm...

It is clear that even though Yoko has been taught the vocabulary for the task, she feels overwhelmed by what she is about to do. Remember, we need to give our students support throughout the entire task until they feel totally confident completing it independently. One method of helping the learner is to show them a framework with conversation prompts like the one below. You can give them a few minutes to read through the prompts before they start to speak.

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| Cinema assistant: | greet customer |
| Customer: | say that you want to buy a ticket for tonight |
| Cinema assistant: | ask what film |
| Customer: | ask which films are on tonight |
| Cinema assistant: | tell the customer about the films. |
| | Screen 1: Gone With The Rain |
| | Screen 2: Star Wars 16 |
| | Screen 3: Back to the Past |
| Customer: | choose a film and ask the price for one ticket |
| Cinema assistant: | tell the customer a price |
| Customer: | ask what time the film starts |
| Cinema assistant: | tell the customer a time |
| Customer: | say thankyou and goodbye |

If your student is more confident, you can give them instructions rather than a framework, such as the instructions below. But again, give your student a couple of minutes to read through the instructions before they begin to speak.

You want to buy a cinema ticket for tonight. Call the cinema and find out: what movies are showing; what time the last movie begins; how much a ticket for one adult is. When you have finished, choose a time and buy the ticket using your credit card.

These instructions will help your student organize their thoughts and prompt them to make questions and get relevant information from you. When the student feels confident, try taking the card away and repeating the exercise.

Read aloud

There is always a lot of controversy surrounding this activity. I personally am very sensitive to asking my students to read aloud as I hated doing it when I was a young boy, but some do agree that it can be very beneficial for your learner. I would say that if you do ask your students to read aloud, maybe from a book or text, you are very sensitive yourself to whether they are enjoying the experience or not.

The activities above are a good start, but remember to be creative and find new ways of using such materials, always keep in mind that above all, language learning should be fun! Remember to always allow your student lots of time to speak and provide a safe environment for them to make mistakes in without feeling stupid.

Survival language for your learner

Learners at an early stage of learning will need lots of useful phrases to help them out when the going gets tough. These include such simple phrases as ‘could you say that again?’ or ‘I don’t understand’. Little pieces of language like this can really help our learners. For a ready-made handout to give to your student in their first lesson, see our companion website at theonlineenglishteacher.com. You can also find examples there of conversation questions that will help keep the conversation going.

Speaking checklist

- Let your student do the majority of the speaking
- Correct errors after they have finished
- Ask open questions to keep the conversation going
- Brainstorm topics before starting a discussion
- Use models to provide support for speaking activities
- Avoid meaningless open conversation if possible
- Show interest in whatever your learner talks about
- Give positive reinforcement
- Smile and have fun

Section 4

How to teach listening

Asking our learners to speak week after week is all good, but although they are becoming more fluent, more confident and more able to tackle difficult situations, will they be able to understand anyone else? Languages are never constant. Think about the place where you are from and the way people speak. Now think about a town or city a hundred miles in any direction, and the likelihood is they speak in a slightly different way to you. We need to prepare our learners for differences in: accent, speed, fluency, pronunciation, emotion and so on.

The best way we can achieve this is by exposing them to a variety of language through listening.

Widening the exposure

Who speaks English? This question may sound a little silly but carefully think about it. English is not just something spoken by the English! English has rapidly become a global language, which is being used all over the world. The chances are that our learner will come across English being spoken by many different nationalities who all speak the language in a slightly different way.

Our learners will also have to get used to listening to lots of different people speaking English. Depending on their situation, this list could include school teachers and university lecturers, doctors and nurses, a step-parent from another country, TV celebrities and film stars, waiters and hotel staff, business acquaintances, lawyers, plumbers, electricians and presidents of the United States. This means that just listening to your voice is not enough. It's often the case that students get used to the voice of their teacher, but as soon as they listen to someone else speaking, their listening skills seem to fall apart!

Our learner may also want to listen to a wide range of different things. The list is endless, but might include news broadcasts, songs, conversations, speeches, lectures, football commentaries, instructions, timetable announcements and the results of an important medical examination from a doctor.

Therefore providing listening material that covers different styles and content of spoken English is essential.

Listening is difficult

For many English learners, listening is the hardest skill to master. Understanding spoken English can be a lot harder than understanding written: when reading a text in English, learners can read as slowly as they want, and re-read parts of a text if they don't understand it; when listening to someone speaking English, the speed is controlled by the speaker, not the listener and learners often find that it's spoken too fast for them to process. In addition, in written English we can clearly see where one word ends and another starts because we put spaces between words, but in spoken English, words frequently blend into each other making it hard for learners to pick out words even if they already know them. For these reasons, listening is a skill that is important skill to develop, and in which you can give your learner lots of help using some of the ideas we explain below.

Finding material

Finding high quality listening material is usually the most difficult part of organizing a listening lesson for your student, but once you have great listening material, you have an amazing learning resource. When we search for materials, we need to make sure they are:

- ➔ Generally quite short; a good length is anything between 1 and 4 minutes.
- ➔ Appropriate for the learner's level.
- ➔ Transcribed if possible.
- ➔ Relevant to the learner's needs.

The Internet is full of great listening materials: YouTube, Ted Talks, BBC World Service, podcasts, radio shows. In addition to the Internet, you can use CDs from English learning course books, recordings you make yourself, movies and TV. We've included lots more in our resources and materials section later in part 3 of this book.

The listening lesson step-by-step

So let's imagine we have our short listening material, and for the purpose of this section, let's imagine the material is a woman asking for directions in London. The listening might look something like this:

Woman: Excuse me, I'm sorry. Could you help me, I'm a little lost.
Stranger: Of course, where are you trying to get to?
Woman: Could you tell me where Tower Bridge is please?
Stranger: Yes, sure. Go along Church Street until you see the traffic lights, turn left and then carry on until you get to the park.
Woman: The park?
Stranger: Yes, that's right. Then go through the park and carry on along Granger Road and you will see it in front of you.
Woman: OK, that's great! Thanks!

How would you use this material with your student? What would you do before the student started listening? How would you check they understood it? Think for a few moments for how you would actually use this material in your lesson.

Lighting up the language

When we think about a topic our brain naturally opens up its bank of words for us to make withdrawals that are connected to the topic. So if I were to ask you about farming for example, your brain will automatically go into its library and pull out all of the words it has to do with farming such as tractor, hay, animals, poultry, farmer, straw, boots, manure and so on. This function is extremely important in a listening lesson. By allowing the learner to go into their own 'library' of words before they listen will prepare them immensely for the listening ahead. So using our example above, before the student listens to the material, we could ask questions about being lost, or finding our way around or even asking them what they know about London. Here are some examples I would start this lesson with:

Have you ever been lost in a strange place? What happened?
Do you like asking for directions?
Do you prefer to use paper maps or maps on your phone? Why?

By having this informal chat with your student regarding the topic before you listen, you have lit up some of the language in their brain they will most likely hear in the listening. The learner will also feel more confident moving into the listening.

The two kinds of listening

Let's look at a couple of examples: when we listen to the morning news on the radio, are we really focused on the reports? Probably not. We are usually just listening for the 'gist' of what is happening in the world, while we are walking around, brushing our teeth, making the coffee and

so on. Now, let's imagine we are on a train platform and the announcer starts calling out the train numbers and times. Here we are very focused and are now listening for specific details so we know exactly which platform to run to. We refer to these two types of listening as listening for gist and listening for detail

Although the examples above separate the two kinds of listening, most of us in our native language are constantly switching between the two without realizing. But as a student of a foreign language it can be very difficult for this natural process to take place. Therefore we must break our listening lesson down to accommodate both processes separately.

Listening for gist

In our listening lesson, this will be the first task we do. Let's again use our conversation above as an example. If we want to get our students to just gather the gist of the conversation, what information do we want them to tell us after they have listened? Here are a couple of questions we could ask our student:

Where does the woman want to go?

Does the stranger help her or not?

We don't want our learners to give us any real details. Just the big picture. By the way, the first time a student listens to any kind of material, it is advisable not to give them a transcript because this can encourage them to look for the detail, and at individual words, at a time when this is not all that helpful to them.

Listening for detail

So, we've discussed with our student what it's like being lost and what it's like asking for directions, then our learner has listened to the recording once and answered the two gist questions. Now it is time for the learner to listen to the recording again. This time we want to challenge our student and have them give us a more detailed account of what they heard. For the recording above, we could ask our student to draw a simple map to show how to get to Tower Bridge. They could do this on a piece of paper, and show it to you via the webcam, or, even better, they could draw the map on an online whiteboard.

As you can see, this question is a lot more taxing for the learner as it requires them to hear the detail in the listening. This can be very challenging for students and should be dealt with sensitively. Look at these suggestions:

➡ Discuss the topic with the student

➡ Tell the learner what the listening will be about and ask them to think about what they will hear.

- ➔ Provide the student with some 'gist' questions and listen once
- ➔ Feedback with the learner. If they have failed to answer the questions, let them listen to the recording again.
- ➔ Feedback with learner, give them 'detailed questions' and listen again
- ➔ Feedback with learner and if needed do a further listening of the material.
- ➔ Feedback with learner and move on to next task.

What if they just don't get it?

In the situation where your learner cannot complete the listening exercise look at the do's and don'ts below:

Do: play the recording again. Some teachers agree that students should ideally hear a listening at least three times in a good listening skills lesson.

Do: allow the learner to use the transcript if the listening has become too difficult.

Do: stop the recording at key moments where the answer may be.

Do: encourage your learner by giving positive feedback in this very stressful part of their learning experience.

Do: read the transcript yourself if the learner is having difficulties. The likelihood is that your student will be used to your voice. Also, you have the ability to slow down the language.

Don't expect your learner to hear everything. Remember, listening is an extremely challenging part of language learning.

Don't give the transcript to the learner unless they are really struggling.

Don't rely on one playing of the material.

Don't choose listening materials that are too challenging because this may de-motivate your learner.

Receiving and producing

Listening, like reading is a receptive skill. This means that the material is being fed to the learners, and their only job is to decode the information. On the other hand, we have productive skills, which are speaking and writing. These skills rely on the learner's output.

Productive skills: Speaking and writing

Receptive skills: Reading and listening

We regularly find that as teachers the best lessons are mixture of these skills. So, once again, let's look at our example of the woman lost in London. The learner has listened to the conversation and answered our questions. What do we do next? Well, the easiest thing here would be to allow the learner to practice the conversation through a speaking exercise. This could be more controlled: just reading the transcript; or much freer: having a new conversation based on the transcript with the teacher. Or the production may be in the form of writing. The learner at this point might be asked to write down the direction from her home to the local supermarket. Whatever you choose, do remember that the listening will nearly always guide us to a production skill of some sort. For more information about production, see the sections on Speaking and Writing.

Useful ways of using your transcript

When doing any listening, it is important to try and have a transcript of the listening to hand, for both you and your student. Transcripts are a great resource and can be used in a number of ways.

Gap-fills

Take your transcript, then copy and paste it into an online whiteboard. Now replace key words or phrases with underscores. Look at the example below that has been made from our example from before.

Woman: Excuse me, I'm sorry. Could you help me, I'm a bit _____.

Stranger: Of course, where are you trying to _____?

Woman: Could you tell me where _____ is please?

Stranger: Yes, sure. _____ Church Street until you see the traffic lights, turn left and then _____ until you get to the park.

Woman: The park?

Stranger: Yes, that's right. Then _____ the park and carry on along Granger road and you will see it _____ you.

Woman: OK, that's great! Thanks!

If your student needs extra help, you can give them the missing words or phrases. If you're using an online whiteboard, just type each word in a separate text box, and your student can drag and drop them into the correct space. (In our example, the missing words and phrases are: lost, get to, Tower Bridge, go along, carry on, go through, in front of).

Notice above that we do not just have to take out single words, we can take out entire phrases too. Try experimenting with gap-fills, sometimes most of a text could be a gap, sometimes the gaps may only correspond to numbers or specific kinds of words. Sometimes there may only be one gap! The more you try and test these ideas, the more you will see what works and what doesn't work with your learners.

Ordering

You could also scramble the conversation, and ask your student to put the lines of the conversation in the correct order. You can either do this in word processing software and send the file to your student, or better still, do it on an online whiteboard: before the lesson, paste each line of the conversation into a separate text box, mix up the lines and during the lesson, ask your student to sort the conversation into the correct order while listening to the recording. To make the task harder, remove the names of the people speaking ('woman' and 'stranger'). To make it easier, give them tell them which lines are first and last in the dialogue.

This is a great technique that will instil confidence in your learners. As a rule of thumb, always do the first one with your student, so they know how to complete a task.

Listen and check

This activity is a great detailed listening task and can be used with almost any listening script you have. Take several words from the listening and then add a few words that are not in the listening. The learners must listen to the audio and tell you which words they hear. For example, you might give them words and phrases like 'go along', 'turn right', 'carry on', 'behind', 'in front of', and 'turn left'; you can simply type these words into the Skype text conversation box, or type them into your online whiteboard, or make a tick box worksheet in a word processor and send it to your student. Then they can tell you the words they heard in the listening. Notice that the words that are not in the listening are still connected with the theme of giving directions which the student will probably come across at some point during the lesson.

There are countless other listening activities we can do with our learners, all it takes is the imagination of the teacher to create them. Here are a couple of others we really like:

Listen and summarize

This is definitely an activity which will require a more detailed listening approach, so remember to add a gist task in here for the first listening. Ask the learner to listen carefully and make notes. Insist they do not try to write sentences as this will take too long. If the student struggles, play the recording a few times. When they have finished ask them to reformulate their notes as either a speaking task or a written task. This is a great exercise for a student who may have to study in a foreign language and thus needs to do this on a daily basis.

Listen and draw

This is a lot of fun and can produce some really nice results. Imagine I gave you an A4 sheet of paper and a pencil, then I told you a story and you had to draw my story as pictures. Well, that's exactly it! This can be done from you to your learner or the other way around. When your student has finished drawing, you can then ask them to try and tell you the same story you told them, but by using their drawing to help them remember. So for our 'lost lady' example above, how would you draw that?

Listening to yourself

We all hate to do it, but for the language learner this can be incredibly useful. Give your students the opportunity to record themselves speaking. Nowadays most of us have phones that are capable of recording, and now many of the video conferencing tools such as Skype can do this too. When your learner has finished, listen to the conversation again together and see if your learner can pick out their own mistakes. Remember not to be too harsh with your feedback, motivation through constructive feedback is the key to your learner's motivation.

Listening to Songs

Another way of helping your student develop her listening skills is to use recordings of people singing English rather than speaking it. We often think of learning through songs as something that small children do. Think of that awesome song, 'The Wheels on the Bus'. In this simple song, language learners are exposed to the correct use of prepositions and articles, the present simple and words for different parts of the bus, and the repetition of lines helps learners remember words and structures. Young children don't even realise they're learning. It's just fun and entertaining. Of course, with a song like that it helps to be three years old. While we wouldn't recommend using The Wheels on the Bus with teenagers or adults, there are countless other songs you can use; used in conjunction with song lyrics, they can provide a very powerful source of language that can quickly be exploited in a language lesson.

Songs can, of course, be found on YouTube, or, if you have it saved on your computer as an mp3 file, sent to your student. And lyrics can also be found on sites like www.azlyrics.com. Once you have a copy of a song's lyrics, you have a source of authentic language, packed with useful words and phrases, that, with a little editing, can form the basis of some activities that will develop your student's skills listening to and reading English.

If you are trying to teach a specific language feature, you could select a song that includes that language feature. For example, the second conditional uses the structure "if + subject + past simple.... , subject + would...". The Beyoncé song, "if I were a boy" is a great example of how to use the second conditional. Here are a few ideas for activities to use with songs.

Activity 1: Mixed up lines (15 minutes)

Aim: students put lines of lyrics into the correct order

On your computer, select a line of text; cut and paste it to another part of the document, then do the same for the other lines. In other words, jumble up the song lines. If you're using an online whiteboard like IDroo, copy and paste each line of the song lyrics into the whiteboard, each line as a separate text box, and mix up the lines. Then your student has to put the song lines in the correct order. It helps if there are lots of lines that rhyme. This forces the student to think about rhyming patterns and also about the meaning of the song. Then your student can listen to the song via YouTube or an mp3 file and check their answers, or they can read (or sing if they want!) the song back to you.

Activity 2: Missing Words (15 minutes)

Aim: students fill in missing words

Send students a copy of the lyrics with words missing. To do this it's best to delete the word and replace it with around 10 underscores (e.g. All you need is _____). (You could simply change the colour of the text from black to white, but a lazy, smart student might work this one out and change the colour back again!) As always, this can be done on an online whiteboard.

The words could be randomly blanked out (every 7th word is a common practice) or just blank out the final word of each line. Or you could pick and choose the words to blank out, to make the task of working out the missing words harder or easier, depending on how good your student is at English. Blanking out filler words like the, a, of, for, prepositions like on, in, to, at and connectives like and, but and or, makes for quite a challenging task, but also draws the student's attention to the important role these small words play. Once again, students need to make use of their knowledge of words, their knowledge of rhyme and their understanding of the meaning of the lyrics to complete the task. Again, students can listen to the song to check their answers, or they can read/sing the lyrics back to you for checking.

Activity 3: change the lyrics

This is actually a language production activity. Send students a copy of some song lyrics and ask them to change some words. This is an example of substitution writing, where you use a model of writing, but change individual words or phrases inside it.

If you're a teacher with a musical talent, why not combine the skills and offer a specialised way of teaching English through music. Maybe you're a good singer or can play the guitar or piano, and you have access to an instrument, you could make teaching English through music a core

part of the learning experience for your students. Instead of using YouTube or mp3 files, you could play and sing the songs.

Listening checklist

- Never jump straight into the listening.
- Allow the learner to predict what they think the listening will contain.
- Always set a 'gist' task for the first listening.
- After your 'gist' task, listen again and set a 'detailed' listening task.
- Play the recording several times if necessary
- Use the transcript to help your learner when necessary.
- Listening is difficult, so motivate your learner with lots of positive reinforcement.
- Choose a listening that matches your student's ability and interests.
- Be creative and have fun!

Section 5

How to teach reading

Being able to read a text written in English is an essential part of what it takes to be a proficient user of English. Even if all your student want to do with English is to go on holiday in an English-speaking country, they will still have to make sense of things like signs, adverts, notices, posters and railway timetables; students studying at universities will have to make sense of long, academic texts. Reading is therefore an essential skill and like any skill it takes practice to get good at it.

Like listening, reading is a receptive skill: it requires the learner to take in language and make sense of it. But not necessarily all of a text. Often, reading is just about understanding the main idea of a text: what it's all about. We call this gist. Sometimes though, learners have to read for details in the text, such as facts and opinions. Occasionally, we might ask learners to pull words and phrases out of a text that they can use, but rarely should we expect learners to understand every word in a text. One of the most important parts about a reading activity, then, is to give your learner a purpose.

Students can very easily become de-motivated by reading due to factors such as the amount of time it takes, the difficulty of the text, and the detraction away from the more motivating productive skills such as speaking. Although, as online teachers, we would not want to spend too much time in our lessons allowing the students to practice reading, we must not neglect it. There are many useful skills that we can provide our learners with to help them with their reading. Let's look at a typical student's approach to reading in English.

Myumi is a Japanese fashion student and has been studying English for a few months. Myumi's teacher, David, asked her to read the newspaper everyday in English to practice her reading. She started doing this but very quickly gave up. She found that she could barely get past the first few sentences. She was using her dictionary every five or six words, and was going so slowly through the text that she was losing the meaning. Her teacher advised her to translate the text, as this would make it easier. Myumi then tried this, but translating even one article took hours and hours, although, she did learn a few words. Myumi's teacher then told her to change the news she was reading to something like the BBC. He said that this was very good English. Myumi struggled again with all of the vocabulary and finally took a break from her learning as she believed that she did not have a natural ability to learn English.

This situation above, unfortunately, is one that is all too common in the world of English language teaching. Myumi's teacher had the best of intentions and did a very sensible thing, asking her to read at home, it was just too bad that he did not know how to support his student. Can you think of any ways in which David could have helped his learner?

Tickling your learner's motivation

It's important to remember that reading is a very diverse area. Here are a few examples of reading materials: newspaper articles, web pages, movie scripts, song lyrics, short stories, scientific articles, biographies and autobiographies, children's stories, restaurant menus, signs and notices, blogs, diaries and journals, magazine articles, timetables, comics, Twitter feeds, discussion boards on the Internet.

The one problem with this is that the students probably don't read all of these items in their own language, let alone in English! In the situation we looked at above, David asked Myumi to read the news everyday. He did not consider whether she liked to read the news in her own language. If Myumi enjoys reading comics in Japanese, why not ask her to do this in English? Maybe she likes to read fashion magazines or books about history? Giving our learners the opportunity to mirror what they do in their own language can do wonders for motivation and is a great starting point for their experience in reading in a new language. As their confidence grows, we can begin to introduce new styles and types of text. Remember to do a 'needs analysis' of your student in their first lesson with you to really find out the kinds of thing they enjoy.

Taking the dictionary away

Look at this sentence:

After adjusting the co-ordinating rods, the banjo played a fine tune.

What is a 'co-ordinating rod'? The likelihood is, you guessed it was a part of a banjo that could change the sound. It is also very likely that you have never come across this word before but felt relatively confident with the meaning and could read on without using a dictionary. Guessing words from context is something we do in our language naturally every day. You don't carry a dictionary everywhere, do you? So, this is something we need to help our learners with. Taking away their dictionary or discouraging its use is a very important part of speeding up their reading and thus helping them get the meaning of the text as a whole. Of course, there will be times when a dictionary is needed, but for the most part, helping the student to either skip the difficult word or guess the meaning is a very important skill. Do remember to be sensitive to your learner; reading after all is very difficult - just a little nudge when they are about to use their dictionary is all you need.

Helping our learners to read without a dictionary

- ➔ Look at the surrounding words. Can the learners guess the meaning of the difficult item of vocabulary just by looking at the words around it? Think back to our example of the ‘co-ordinating rod’
- ➔ Does the word have a capital letter? If it does then our students should be able to guess that this is the name of something, maybe a place or person.
- ➔ Do we need to know the word to continue reading? Many times not. If I gave you a scientific journal, you could read it and understand the gist but would you understand the jargon?
- ➔ What kind of word is it? Ask the student to look carefully and recognise whether the word is a noun, adjective, verb and so on.

Read aloud?

Think back to your school days. Reading aloud in the English class filled most of us with dread, making one little mistake caused shockwaves of laughter, the sniggers at the back of the class when you pronounced a word wrong, sweating palms, heart racing, waiting for your turn. I think we have all been there. Now imagine doing that in a different language! Many professionals in this field believe that reading aloud is very useful for the language learner and I agree to an extent. As we have said before, motivation is key to language learning. Be careful and only ask your student to read aloud if you already know them well, feel safe making mistakes in front of you or are generally confident with this kind of thing. Most of your teaching as an online teacher will be one to one, therefore this will be easy to gauge; if you have more than one student in your group, be very careful about how they may feel reading aloud in front of the other.

Staging a reading lesson

Now let’s imagine we have a short news article, maybe something you have found on the BBC News website about a court case (you know your student wants to become a lawyer some day). You give them a link to the web page so they can read it on their own computer, or you can share your screen with your student, or you display the page on an online whiteboard.

How exactly will you use this text? What stages will there be in a lesson? As with any other activity, setting up and staging a reading activity is as important as the reading itself. Let’s look at some useful stages:

1. Prediction

Before our learners even look at the words on the screen, one really good exercise is for them to predict the content of the text. If we were using this news article, we could ask our learner to look at the headline and photo, and then we could discuss the headline and photo with them.

From there we would ask our learner to consider what the article will be about. This prediction stage gives our students time to retrieve and start using the kind of language that may come up in the text, thus making it easier to read.

2. First reading (skimming)

Now ask your student to read the text quickly to see if their prediction is correct or not, and to develop their understanding of what the text as a whole is about. Encourage them to read the first sentence of each paragraph and to see what sorts of nouns and verbs appear in the text. What they shouldn't do is read word-by-word because at this stage they're still trying to get a general understanding of the text, so it's often a good idea to give them a time limit of, say, 1 minute.

When they have finished, ask them to feedback to you what the text was about. There is no right or wrong answer here and no need for you to correct anything. Sometimes it is a good idea to have a very general question that the student can answer at this point, such as "who is on trial and what are they accused of?"

3. Second reading (Scanning)

Now it is time for our learners to read the text in a little more detail. A good idea now would be to have some specific questions about the text that the students must find the answer to. Ask your student a question, and give them a minute or two to scan the text for the answer. Again try to discourage the use of a dictionary.

In my own classes I usually use an online whiteboard to display the text (either with the text pasted from the web or by using a screen capture tool) and I ask students to highlight where they found the answer to a question. I sometimes ask students to underline words they don't understand, so that when we have finished reading for detail, we can look at the vocabulary together.

4. Feedback

When the reading has finished, a good idea is to let your learner reflect on the text. If we were using our example of a court case on BBC News, we could ask for the learner's point of view towards it. If it was a passage from a novel, maybe we would ask them to predict what they think happens next.

Making a Text Comprehensible

Now, it's all very well us suggesting you use text from BBC News, or from a novel, with your student, but what if they can't understand the text? What if there are too many words in the text they don't understand? There are various solutions to this common problem.

1. Pre-teach vocabulary

If you are going to approach a rather difficult text with your learner, it is sometimes a good idea to pre-teach some of the more difficult items of vocabulary. Before giving the reading to the student, go through it yourself and choose some of the words you think they will have difficulty with and go through them with your learner before they read. Always remember to try and get your student to tell you the meaning, rather than you tell them. If you are going to pre-teach vocabulary, try to keep the amount of items low. A good number of new vocabulary items to teach in a typical class is about eight. It is advisable to thoroughly get to know the language yourself before trying to teach it to someone else; teaching vocabulary can be very tricky sometimes! Read the chapter on teaching vocabulary for ideas.

2. Simplify the text

Another option is to edit the text so that it's easier to understand. You can make sentences shorter and you can also replace difficult words with easier ones. Look at this example:

Lionel Messi put the visitors 3-0 up with a stunning strike halfway through second half.

It uses language that may be unfamiliar to your student, and the sentence is quite long. So, depending on the level of your student, you could edit this sentence like this:

Lionel Messi scored a beautiful goal for Barcelona. He scored the goal in the middle of the second half. Now it was 3-0.

In the English teaching world, these are often known as graded texts or graded readers. Many popular novels have been turned into graded readers for English language learners, and these are great resources for students. Another good source of graded texts is the Simple English language option in Wikipedia. One excellent source of graded news stories can be found at breakingnewsenglish.com, which has a selection of regularly updated news stories graded at several different levels.

The only problem with simplifying texts is that students will need to come across more advanced words in order to expand their vocabulary, so if you only use simplified texts then you may be denying your student exposure to the very language they need to learn. Therefore there is a useful third option.

3. Make the task easier

If you are going to use a difficult text with your student, just make the questions easier. This way, your student can complete the tasks you set without having to understand so much of the text. Conversely, if you are using an easy text with a more advanced student, make the task harder.

Encouraging reading outside of the classroom

As we saw in the case study earlier, David asked Myumi to read a news article each week in her own time. Although Myumi failed at this very difficult task, David was doing a very positive thing. Asking our learners to read in their own time is an excellent way of getting them to practice English in their own time. This is called extensive reading. Remember to encourage your learner to read something they will enjoy and keep their motivation high by doing the following:

Have a short discussion each week about the reading they have done in their own time. Remember, this is not something they need corrected on or helped with. You are simply allowing them to feedback to you.

Set reading tasks each week such as writing a very short summary of the material they have read. When the student presents this to you, use it as a springboard for a short discussion.

Ask your learner to keep a special vocabulary book, which they use to help them record vocabulary they have gained from their reading material. Check this regularly in order to make sure that the vocabulary is recorded with the correct meaning. Checking this regularly will also encourage your learner to keep using the book.

Maybe with a younger learner you may want to ask them to write a book review or design a poster to show what the reading was about.

Activities for a reading lesson

Ordering a text

A nice activity for your learners is to have them sort a text into its correct order. One way of doing this is to copy and paste each line of text into an online whiteboard, or to use your computer's snapshot tool to take a picture of each line of text. Do this for each line of text (no more than 12 lines or it becomes too complicated). Then, during the lesson, ask your student to drag and move each line of text until they are in the correct order. When they have finished, ask your student to explain what the text was about and why they chose this order.

Pictures

Using pictures as a prediction tool works very well. Imagine in today's lesson you are going to use a news article about a new Mars landing that will happen soon. Maybe you could show your

learners several pictures of planets, space, satellites etc. and ask your student to tell you what they think the article may be about. Remember at this stage there are no right or wrong answers. When the student reads the text for the first time they can simply skim the material to see if their predictions were correct.

Be creative. Above are a couple of ideas you can use in your reading lessons. Why not try creating an activity yourself and see how well it works. The more creative you are, the more both you and your learner will enjoy the activity. Good luck!

Reading checklist

- Think carefully about the kind of text your learner will enjoy.
- Try to keep the length of the reading material in the lesson short.
- Don't introduce too much vocabulary from a reading script, about eight new items of vocabulary is about the standard.
- Discourage overuse of a dictionary.
- Predict the content of the text before you read.
- Introduce techniques such as skimming and scanning.
- Always allow the learner to feedback on what they have just read.
- Encourage reading outside of the classroom.
- Don't dismiss reading as a part of language learning.
- Have fun!

Section 6

How to teach writing

Why is writing important?

With the advent of online communication via the Internet, writing has never been more important. Writing like this is often done in short but frequent bursts, but other forms of writing, such as the kind of writing demanded by English language proficiency tests and academic writing, is also growing in importance amongst English language learners. So writing is an area that cannot be ignored by the Online English Teacher.

In some ways, writing is easier for the English language learner than speaking. When speaking, you have to think what to say and say it almost at the same time. But writing allows the learner more thinking time; you can pause, think, go back and edit what you have written. However, writing is also less forgiving than speaking: people don't tolerate errors in writing as much as they tolerate errors in speaking, so learners have to make more effort getting their grammar right as well as the meaning of what they are writing.

A lot of students don't like to write because it can be so hard: not only do they have to think about vocabulary and meaning, they also have to concentrate on less interesting things like grammar, spelling, punctuation and handwriting. And often they don't have a real audience for their writing – it's only their teacher who gets to read what they write – so it feels less real than speaking. So what we, as teachers, need to do is make the process of writing fun and more meaningful; we also need to support the writing process as much as possible.

When to do writing

Rather than doing writing during a lesson, it's often a better idea to set your student a writing task that they can complete for homework after the lesson is over. A student's time with you is precious, and this time is often better spent speaking with you and getting feedback, rather than silently writing. Good writing involves four stages – planning, drafting, feedback and rewriting – and it's in the planning and feedback stages where lesson time can be usefully used.

Planning Stage

Planning during a lesson should involve getting the student to talk about the topic they are going to write about. This is often known as 'Talk for Writing'. Talk for Writing can involve brainstorming useful words and phrases with the student, brainstorming ideas for inclusion in the writing, and

organizing them all into a mind map. The teacher can also feed in useful language and ask the students questions, prompting them for good language to include in the piece of writing.

As if writing wasn't already hard enough, students also have to come up with ideas. You can help the student in the planning stage by easing this cognitive burden in several ways: you can show the student an example of the kind of text they need to write, which gives the student a model to follow; the student could write a substitution text based on this model, changing certain words and phrases to create a different story or description; finally, you could ask your student to write about a photo or series of photos, either by describing a photo, or comparing different photos or by turning a series of photos into a story. These prompts for writing mean the student needs to spend less time thinking about ideas, and more time thinking about language.

A good planning stage means your student can go away and write a draft armed with a lot of good language and ideas.

Feedback Stage

Another good use of lesson time comes after the student has done a piece of writing. The student's writing will almost certainly be riddled with errors, and this is a good thing because it means that the writing can be used as a resource for new learning.

Feedback is essential to learning. Learning anything, whether it be learning to walk, learning to drive, learning a list of capital cities or learning English requires feedback to happen, because without feedback we don't know if we're doing it right or wrong. Some feedback is straightforward: when we learn to walk, we know we're doing something wrong if we fall flat on our faces; when we learn to drive, we know we're doing something right if the car moves down the road without stalling; but feedback can also come from people more expert at a skill or knowledge than the learner. So parents give children feedback on their walking skills, driving instructors give feedback as we struggle with the car gear stick and the pedals, and teachers tick and cross our lists of capital cities. When learning a language like English, a learner needs to know if what they are saying or writing is correct or not, and this is where the teacher comes in: in fact, our role as a provider of feedback is probably our most important role. So giving our students lots of feedback on their writing is a valuable use of lesson time.

In a traditional English language classroom heaving with students, what often happens is the students will write something during the lesson and the teacher will take in each piece of writing and mark each one before the next lesson. Lots of students means lots of marking, but with limited time, all the teacher can really do is give each one a quick check, underline all the errors and write 'good' or 'poor' at the bottom. Most students will shove their writing in their bag and forget about it. Online, one-to-one teaching has a major advantage over classroom teaching

because now you have the time, during the lesson, to work with one student and give them quality feedback on their writing, feedback that will actually help them improve. The kind of feedback we can give our students online, especially in a one-to-one lesson, is known as reformulation. In reformulation, we take the language produced by our learner and with our guidance we help our learner improve it.

Here's a short piece of writing by one of our Russian elementary level students. We'll call her Dasha. How could you help her reformulate her writing?

Yesterday I go shoping mall. I buy socks and shoes. Then I go Starbucks and I drink coffee. Cofee good. Then I meet with my friend. He's name Mark. We talk about football and say joke. Then I go to home and I eat my mother.

Now, while the writing is riddled with errors, the first thing to note is that almost all the meaning is very clear. Dasha has actually communicated the events of her day very well. But to the teacher, especially native speakers of English, grammatical errors tend to spring out of the page and slap them in the face, so it's easy to focus on the errors. However, we also want to encourage communication of meaning, so we need to praise Dasha for communicating well. If all we do is focus on Dasha's errors and not her successes, we run the risk that Dasha will simply throw her arms up in despair and give up.

In any case, there is some good language in the writing, such as "we talk about football" and the spelling is not too bad, so this deserves praise. But what about the errors? There are too many to list – and this means there are too many for Dasha to remember. So what do we focus on? Probably just one or two things, either the things that affect the communication of meaning, or the things that she actually does know.

In fact, many student errors can be corrected by students themselves. I knew that Dasha was more than able to use the past simple tense, but in the messy challenge of writing, when she had to think about meaning, grammar, spelling, punctuation and handwriting all at the same time, the past simple just slipped her mind. She was so wrapped up in writing about her day, that she forgot the past simple. It's understandable! Once I'd pointed out that she was writing about yesterday, she realized she should have used the past simple tense. With the writing on Google Docs, she was able to correct all but one (bought, not buyed) of the tense errors while I watched on the screen.

Yesterday I went shoping mall. I buyed socks and shoes. Then I went Starbucks and I drank coffee. Cofee good. Then I met with my friend. He's name Mark. We talked about football and said joke. Then I went to home and I ate my mother.

The other major errors were in her use of articles and prepositions - “went to the shopping mall”, not “went shopping mall” – and spelling. Some of these she could correct herself, some needed a bit more prompting or explanation from me. Many errors were not dealt with in the lesson but I made a mental note of them. But there was a glaring error at the end of the piece of writing: “I ate my mother. Really? You ate your mother, Dasha? What did you eat?” Of course, we didn’t have a budding Hannibal Lector on our hands, just a student who had forgotten or didn’t know the phrase “eat with”. But this was the only error that affected meaning.

I was also able to suggest to Dasha some language to make her writing better overall: instead of “coffee good”, I suggested using “delicious”; and then there was the repeated use of “then”. She could use “next” or “after that”. So by the time we had finished going through the writing, which included some spellings, Dasha was writing:

Yesterday I went to shopping mall. I buyed socks and shoes. Then I went to Starbucks and I drank coffee. Coffee was delicious. After that I met my friend. His name was Mark. We talked about football and said joke. Finally, I went home and I ate dinner with my mother.

I thought I’d leave articles, “buyed” and the difference between “said” and “told” for another day!

Giving feedback is therefore a balancing act between what you feedback on and what you let pass for another time, between what you praise and what you correct, between giving feedback on meaning and giving feedback on grammar, between giving feedback on something a student should know and giving feedback on what they probably don’t know, between telling them the answer and getting them to self-correct. It’s an imperfect balancing act and what makes giving feedback an art, not a science.

Just one final point on giving feedback: as the example above suggests, give feedback to a student during a lesson, not outside of lesson time away from the student. There are two main reasons for this: firstly, it’s better for the student, because if the feedback is done as a two-way conversation which prompts them to reformulate and correct the writing themselves, the student will learn more; secondly, it’s better for you, the Online English Teacher, because you aren’t having to give up your time for free by marking writing.

Types of writing

There are lots of different types of writing and it's important to think about what kinds of writing your student needs to practise, another reason why a needs analysis is so useful. Does your student need to write academic essays for school, for university, or for an examination? Do they need to write business emails or write business reports? Do they need practice writing stories for school? Learners will usually need practice writing lots of different types of text, including letters, newspaper articles, journals and diaries, postcards, blogs and websites, advertisements, reviews and comments, guides and leaflets.

At a more general level, writing can also be split into two areas: formal writing and informal writing. Formal writing includes such things as job application letters, academic essays and reports; informal writing includes such things as postcards to your family, emails to friends and, increasingly, blog posts. The language required for formal writing is often very different from informal writing. For example:

Hi Mum, hope all's well. Having a great time in Wales. See you soon! Love, Tim!

Dear Mr Ermintrude. Thank you for your letter of 15th June. I will send you a copy of the report along with information about our latest product. I look forward to seeing you at the next board meeting.
Yours sincerely, Dr Timothy Evans.

Formal writing requires a lot more grammar and usually much more precise wording. It's also the area learners may have the most difficulty with

Writing Activities for Lessons

While lengthy writing tasks can be completed by the student outside of lesson, with planning and feedback done during lessons, short, focused writing activities, perhaps focusing on a particular grammatical feature or set of vocabulary, can form part of lessons. Here are some ideas:

Notetaking

Another important form of writing, and an area often neglected, is notetaking. Many students will need to take notes when attending lectures at school and university, and people who work for certain professions may need to take notes at conferences, so if your student needs this, it's a good area for practice. You can practise notetaking quite easily: find a text that relates in some way to your student's needs or interests and read it out, while the student takes notes, usually by writing down key words. After you've finished reading the text, your student then needs to tell

you what you were talking about. Alternatively, you could show them a short video during the lesson and ask your student to take notes and then report back: TED Talks - www.ted.com - or short news bulletins are ideal for this.

Sentence Expansion

Give your student a short sentence such as “the cat was sleeping”. Your student needs to expand the sentence by adding adjectives and adverbs: e.g. “the fat, brown cat was sleeping on the mat” or clauses “the fat, brown cat, which had eaten the grey mouse, was sleeping soundly on the turquoise mat which its owner had just bought from Ikea”. To make it even harder, you can strip out the grammar and just give them basic words: e.g. “cat sleep”. This way the student also has to add in articles, auxiliary verbs and the correct endings of words.

Postcards

Show your student a photo of a holiday scene, a town or a beach, and ask them to write a brief postcard about a holiday. Better still, ask them to write a short postcard about a recent holiday of their own.

Completing an application form

Filling in application forms is a very useful skill for adults and older teenagers, especially if they are applying for jobs or university, for getting something online or even when visiting a country where English is the mother tongue. It can be quite difficult because the wording on application forms is quite formal. So find a blank application form on the Internet and email it to your student; you can help them complete the application form during the lesson.

Timed writing

Give your student 3 minutes to write about something (e.g. what you did last weekend, a description of a football match you watched on TV, three things you want to do by the time you're 40 years old).

Collaborative writing

Instead of getting your student to write everything, why not try a bit of collaborative writing – in other words, write something together? For example, you write the first sentence of a story, such as “the young boy walked into the dark, haunted house” and your student then comes up with another sentence to take the story on a little bit more. You take turns to write. What you, as the teacher can do, is to ensure the story moves on in a particular direction, forcing the student to come up with new language. If the student is making mistakes, you can reformulate them in the correct form and draw the student's attention to the correction. For example:

Teacher: The young boy walked into the dark, haunted house.

Student: He go up the stair

Teacher: He went along the corridor.

Student: He went in the bedroom.

I call this story tennis! You can do this either using Skype's text conversation box, or a text messaging app like WhatsApp or Line, or you could do it as an online document such as Google Docs, or on an online whiteboard.

Dictation

Dictating is sometimes seen as old-fashioned, but it can be effective, especially if you focus on a particular aspect of grammar that your student is finding difficult. Simply dictate a short text to your student, and they type it down, either in Skype's text conversation box or using Google Docs.

Dictogloss

A very powerful adaptation of straightforward dictation is called a dictogloss. When doing a dictogloss activity, you read out a short text two or three times at, or close to, normal reading speed. The student has to take notes, writing down as many words as they can while you are reading, then they use these words to write the text you read out. The main challenge for the student is getting the grammar correct. The final stage of a dictogloss is the most important: the teacher reads out the text again, and the student checks their text to see where there are differences. This allows the student to spot differences between their writing and the text you read out, in effect forcing them to notice the gap between their current knowledge of English and where they are trying to get to. In a well-pitched dictogloss, a student will make errors, because its aim is to encourage students to notice where they are making errors.

When using a dictogloss for the first time, keep it very short, just a few sentences, so that your student learns the skills. In any case, a dictogloss shouldn't be too long and it should ideally be on a topic or text they are familiar with so they don't have to think too much about the meaning of the text. It's a strategy widely used in English teaching and is very effective in helping students see where they are making errors in writing.

Cloze activities

A cloze activity is simply a sentence or a text with missing words, such as:

Lionel Messi plays _____ for Barcelona. He also plays _____ Argentina. He _____ scored lots of _____ for Barcelona.

If your student needs help to fill the blanks, give them the missing words (in the above example, football, for, has, goals) but don't tell them where they go: they need to choose the correct word.

Texting

Texting using SMS is a very common activity all over the world and, because of this, is a useful writing activity for lessons. You can use Skype's text conversation tool for this. Give the activity a real communicative purpose. For example, you might want to arrange something, such as meeting up for a meal at a restaurant, or arranging to meet to play tennis.

Blogging

I strongly suggest you encourage your student to maintain a blog, written in English. This is a great way of encouraging them to write English regularly. They can simply write a sentence a day on something they've done or thought about, or about a hobby. Over time, they will hopefully see how their writing has improved, a great way of motivating them to learn more. And, crucially, blogging will give your student a real audience for their writing; normally, a student writes only for their teacher, but a blog means they are writing for the whole world.

Writing checklist

- Remember that writing is hard – your student has to think about lots of things
- Help them to plan a piece of writing
- Give them a model to base their writing on
- Help your student reformulate a piece of writing
- When reformulating, don't try to correct everything
- Do short writing activities in the lesson
- Get your student to write longer pieces of writing for homework
- Get them blogging!

Section 7

How to teach grammar

The teaching of grammar is often the part of teaching English that is most likely to cause English teachers to break out in a cold sweat. Trying to explain the workings of the third conditional or the past perfect continuous sometimes seems like explaining thermonuclear dynamics, especially when your students don't have enough language to understand what you're talking about. Fortunately, grammar doesn't have to be like this. In this chapter, we'll unpack some of the basics about grammar, including the best way to teach it, along with some activities for teaching grammar (some of which are dangerously fun!)

What is grammar?

Grammar is basically the way we structure words within a sentence and the things we do to words to change their meaning. It involves things like word order (the dog bit the cat, or the cat bit the dog) and the way word endings change as their meaning changes (cat, cats; live, lived, lives), something we call language form.

Why is grammar important?

Grammar is important because grammar makes meaning clearer. Imagine I'm phoning you from a street in downtown Bangkok, talking to you about the wonders of working as an online English teacher when suddenly Godzilla emerges out of the river and starts destroying a shopping mall. I would scream down the phone, "Godzilla is destroying a shopping mall!" You can't see what's happening so you have to rely on my language. The grammar in my sentence makes clear who is doing what ("Godzilla"), what is being destroyed ("a shopping mall") and that it's happening right now ("is destroying"). It also suggests that the shopping mall is non-specific ("a shopping mall" rather than "the shopping mall" or "Central World Mall"). Had my grammar been lousy – and, in fact, because my brain would have been more preoccupied with running away from Godzilla while rescuing children and old ladies from its clutches, rather than the correct form of the present continuous – I might have said something like "Godzilla destroy shopping mall". You could be forgiven for thinking Godzilla did it yesterday, or that he's about to do it, or perhaps he does it all the time in Bangkok, and you might think he was destroying all the shopping malls in Bangkok. Had you been standing next to me, it wouldn't have mattered because you would have seen Godzilla yourself, but on the phone, or in a piece of writing, or in an email, this is where grammar counts. Grammar makes meaning clear.

Grammar is also important because without a focus on grammar, we risk leaving learners at a ‘me Tarzan, you Jane’ kind of English. Yes, they can communicate (as long as it’s in a familiar and immediate situation), but it just sounds bad. So how should we teach grammar?

How is grammar learned?

Once upon a time, grammar was central to language learning. Language learners sat in classrooms learning about grammatical rules and grammatical structures, like “the present continuous is formed with subject + to be + verb + ing”, then spewing out sentences like “the cat is eating...the dog is looking...the girl is playing...the elephant is drinking”, slowly falling asleep to the sound of scratching chalk. The idea was that once you knew grammar, you could simply slot in new words and could potentially say anything. In practice, it led to students who were able to recite rules and produce grammatically correct sentences in isolation, but unable to do the same when faced with the world of real-time, authentic communication.

Students don’t need rules. This is good for teachers because rules are boring and confusing. In order to learn grammar and, crucially, be able to use it, students need three things:

- ➔ They need lots of exposure to language which uses a range of grammatical features;
- ➔ They need to notice how these grammatical features work;
- ➔ They need lots of feedback from the teacher.

1. Lots of exposure

Students need lots of exposure to language in the form of reading and listening texts that contain the kind of grammatical features they need to learn. But exposure alone isn’t enough; students need to have their attention drawn to the language they need to learn. We call this noticing.

2. Noticing

It used to be believed that language learners simply soaked up language, managing to work out the grammar for themselves. We now know this is not the case. Learners have to have their attention drawn to how grammar works, such as how it affects meaning. This means that one of the main roles for teachers is to design activities that draw learners’ attention to grammatical features; this is best done in the context of meaningful language. Look at this short text (which could be typed into Skype or an online whiteboard):

At the weekend I'm meeting John and we are going to go to the cinema. I will probably go shopping before I meet him and then get my nails done. We are going to get something to eat after, I will probably see if he wants to go to an Italian restaurant.

Now you can ask your student to tell you (or underline it if on a whiteboard) all the things the writer is going to do at the weekend. Now, this seems like a very basic activity for the learner, but what we are actually doing here is drawing their attention to the different forms to talk about the future. Without us teaching a thing, the learner will begin to notice that there are different ways, such as 'will' and 'going to' to talk about future plans.

3. Lots of Feedback

One way of drawing learners' attention to certain aspects of language is for the teacher to give them feedback. Students will make grammatical mistakes - lots of them. In fact, mistakes are an essential part of the learning process as learners try to experiment with the language they know and the language they don't quite know yet in order to try out something new. And these errors can be used as opportunities for learning something new.

But how can you give feedback? Imagine you start your lesson with a student, and you ask your student what they did yesterday. Your student excitedly replies:

Student: Yesterday I go to the cinema!

Teacher: No, Boris, not "go" – "went". "I went to the cinema" The past simple of "go" is the irregular form "went". Now, say it again.

Student: Yesterday I went to the cinema.

Teacher: Good!

Any passion your student might have had will soon be sucked away if you do too much of this! So how should you correct this error? In fact, should you even bother? After all, you're trying to have a conversation, not a grammar lesson, and you want to encourage your student to talk. So maybe you could just ignore the error and ask them what movie they saw and what the story was about. But all the time you're having the conversation, your teacher voice is nagging you to correct every mistake: after all, you're a teacher, not a conversational partner. A better way is to do what is known as recasting. Recasting is a way of giving feedback on errors by repeating what the student said, but with the correct form inserted. For example:

Student: Yesterday I go to the cinema!

Teacher: You went to the cinema? Wow! What did you see?

Student: I see X-Men.

Teacher: You saw X-Men? You went to the cinema and saw X-Men? Did you enjoy it?

When you recast, you give your student a snapshot of what accurate language should be like without interrupting the flow of the conversation. It doesn't always work, and you may need to really stress the corrected words for your student to notice the correct form, but it's a good middle ground.

A more overt form of recasting is called reformulating, which we mentioned in the previous chapter. Reformulation is best done when the focus is more on getting language right, rather than having a conversation, so it's well suited to teaching grammar.

Even so, recasting (especially) and reformulating can be quite a haphazard way of dealing with grammatical errors, and because of the vast amount of errors students might make, it's often difficult to know what to focus on. So it's sometimes a good idea to take a pre-emptive strike on your student's grammar, deciding for them what particular aspect of grammar to focus on. By far the best way of focusing on a particular grammatical feature though is to do it through the context of something else – by teaching grammar within the context of meaningful language. After all, as we explained earlier, grammar makes meaning clearer, so without meaning, grammar is a bit pointless.

Grammar In Context

You shouldn't teach grammar as something to be learned on its own, but as an integral part of a communicative task. So it should be “today, we're going to order a meal in a restaurant”, or “today were going to write a letter giving an opinion”, rather than “today we're doing the ‘would like’ form”). Communicative needs should determine what grammar comes up during a lesson. Remember, the purpose of grammar is to make meaning clearer. This is much better and more fun than spending a long time practicing grammatical structures in isolation, and when it's done in context, students also get to see how the grammar fits into the bigger picture and how it supports meaning and communication.

Seeing how grammar fits into the bigger picture of communication is a bit like standing on a hilltop, gazing out over the countryside spread out before you. You can see fields, dotted with animals, woodland, maybe a river and some distant farmhouses. You see the big picture. Next, you take out a pair of powerful binoculars, and focus in on one of the fields. Now you can see cows grazing or sleeping, a farmer fixing a fence, and bales of hay stacked outside a barn. Now

you see some of the detail, a detailed part of the big picture. Then you take the binoculars away and focus on the whole scene again...except now you have a better grasp of some of the detail within the wider scene, knowing that there are cows and bales of hay and a farmer fixing a wall; you have a better understanding of the big picture because you know some of the details that make it up. In language terms, the big picture is the meaning; what you see through the binoculars is grammar.

Task Based Learning

One way of teaching grammar in context is to follow a task-based approach. In a task-based approach to learning, your aim is to enable the student to complete a communicative task by the end of the lesson, such as ordering a meal in a restaurant, complaining about poor customer service, giving a short presentation about their job or doing an IELTS speaking task. The list is endless and the actual task can, of course, be geared to the specific needs of the student, so it's a great way of ensuring that your lessons are truly relevant to your student's needs. In order to achieve the task, students will usually need to use some specific target language; this language can be fed in during the lesson by the teacher, briefly focused upon in isolation, and then used by the student to do the task. It's that focus on, and therefore noticing of, the target language where the learning of grammar takes place.

Here's a good way of structuring a task-based lesson:

Stage 1: Discuss topic

Briefly talk about the topic related to the task. This is to get the student thinking about and using language connected to the topic. Teachers often call this ‘activating schemata’.

Stage 2: Reading or listening task

Give your student a short reading or listening task in which the target language is used. They should read or listen for general understanding (gist).

Stage 3: Reading or listening task

Repeat the reading or listening task. This time the student should listen for detail.

Stage 4: Focus on the target language

Draw your student’s attention to the target language. This might mean underlining or highlighting the target language, or by asking students to discover the target language for themselves.

Stage 5: Focus on pronunciation

It’s useful to practice pronunciation if students are going to be speaking in the final task

Stage 6: The task

Push the student to produce something similar to what they read or heard, essentially a role play with you, the teacher, in one of the roles. You can vary the degree of freedom they have in this task. You might want to give your student fixed words and phrases to use (controlled practice), or give them more freedom (freer practice).

During the task you can give feedback, including the recasting of the target language in order to push your student to ever higher levels of accuracy. So how does this look in practice?

Let’s say you want your student to be able to order food from a menu in a restaurant (perhaps they are going on holiday or on a business trip somewhere where English is spoken). Just knowing a bunch of words for different types of food and drink might be enough to stave off starvation, but we want students to go beyond this stage and use the words in properly formed sentences (or as properly formed as we can expect for their current proficiency level).

The following lesson plan includes lots of speaking and listening, but this is to show how grammar fits into the big picture, the communication of meaning.

Aim: to be able to order food in a restaurant.

Target Language: “I would like...” and “I’d like...”

Stage 1: Focus on the topic

Briefly talk about the last time they went to a restaurant. Focus on personal experiences and knowledge. What did they eat at the restaurant? Who did they go with? Did they enjoy the food? What did they eat and drink?

Stage 2: Focus on the general meaning in a reading or listening task

Now that you’ve got the student thinking about the topic, you can introduce a listening task. Below is a short dialogue set in a restaurant between a waiter and a customer, who is ordering food and drink. I quickly wrote the dialogue myself. It’s not exactly Shakespeare, but it is fairly realistic and it does contain the target language, which is important for later in the lesson. You could act out the dialogue with your student, but in an ideal situation the student should just listen to the dialogue because it means they can focus more on the meaning of the dialogue rather than how to say the words. Alternatively, you can find similar types of dialogue on the Internet (check out Part 3 of our book for some great resources) and coursebooks will almost always have recordings of this kind on their CDs, which your student can listen to via Google Drive. You could even make a recording of the dialogue yourself with a friend acting out one of the roles. At this stage, your student should listen for some sort of general information, such as what food the customer is ordering; if your student is a lower level learner, you can give them a list of different foods and drinks and ask them to tick the ones they hear ordered.

Waiter: Good evening, sir, what would you like to order?

Customer: Hello. I’d like the steak and chips, please.

Waiter: The steak and chips. Would you like some vegetables?

Customer: I’d like some carrots. No peas.

Waiter: Ok. And would you like a drink with that?

Customer: Yes please, a glass of water. And could I have a starter? What soup do you have?

Waiter: We have tomato soup and vegetable soup.

Customer: I’d like the tomato soup, please.

Waiter: I’ll just check your order. You’d like the tomato soup, and for the main course you’d like steak and chips with carrots and peas.

Customer: No, I don’t want the peas, I’d only like the carrots.

Waiter: Oh, I’m sorry. You’d like the steak and chips with carrots, and a glass of water.

Customer: That’s right.

Stage 3: Focus on the detailed meaning in listening task

Now repeat the listening task, but this time ask the student some questions about the detail. Did the customer order any meat? What food did they order? What drink did they order? Are they going to eat anything before the steak and chips? What soups were on offer? What time of day was it? Where are they? What mistake did the waiter make?

Stage 4: Focus on the target language

This is where we ‘notice’ the grammar! Here, we focus in even further, this time on the key language structures that your student will need to complete the task. In this lesson, it’s the “I would like...” or “I’d like...” structure. There are a variety of ways to do this. You can simply ask your student to identify and underline the language used by the customer to request food politely, and perhaps also the language used by the waiter to ask and check the order. But there are many more activities you can work on with your student, all of which are designed to get your student to notice the target language. We’ve made a list of these in the ‘Grammar Activities’ section below.

Stage 5: Focus on pronunciation

We can also focus on pronunciation, especially if we want the student to speak clearly and fluently, so they could practice saying the phrase “I’d like...” clearly otherwise communication can break down. For more on pronunciation, read the chapter on how to teach pronunciation.

Stage 6: The task

So, your student has listened to a model dialogue which contains lots of useful language. They’ve noticed some of the key language used to successfully communicate, and they know how to pronounce it. Now it’s their turn to communicate with you. Give them a menu and you can be their waiter!

Always remember what the target language is. Your student might say things like “I would like fish and chip with pea”: they’ve got some grammar wrong but the target language is correct. You can always come back another day and work on plurals and articles. Your task here is to push your student to greater accuracy, not perfection.

Repeating the task several times is always a good idea. Repetition enables the student to become more fluent and to produce language more automatically, so don’t be afraid to repeat the final task several times. Your student may need written notes the first time the task is carried out, but try to reduce your student’s dependency on notes as you repeat the task, until they are able to do the whole task from memory.

Grammar Activities

The following grammar activities are easy to set up and good for drawing your student's attention towards the target language you want them to become familiar with. Remember that grammar is essentially learned by noticing, so these activities help students notice the grammar. They can be used as standalone activities but they can also be used in stage 4 of the lesson structure we outlined above.

Sentence Matching

This is a very simple activity to set up, and is often used in coursebooks. Write a list of around 8 sentences that include your target language for the lesson; now split each sentence into two parts. Mix up the list of the second part of each sentence. Your student needs to match the first half of each sentence with the correct second half of each sentence.

Grammaring

This is an idea suggested by Scott Thornbury, a teacher of English from New Zealand who has written several very readable books on teaching English. In a grammaring activity, you take a sentence and strip it of its grammar (e.g. word endings, articles, plurals, prepositions and auxiliary verbs) leaving it with just a bunch of words. The student's task is to put the grammar back in. For example, you could take a sentence like:

I would like to order a steak and chips with vegetables.

and strip it of its grammar so it becomes:

I / like / order / steak / chip / vegetable

Your student now needs to put the grammar back into the sentence, to 'grammarize' it. You can give your student several such examples until they can produce the correct form quickly. The whole activity can be done using an online whiteboard, or you can simply type out the 'degrammared' sentence into Skype, or just read out the sentence without the grammar to your student. Here are some more examples of sentences, and their degrammared versions, but when doing these, bear in mind the target language you are trying to get your student to notice.

Would you like any wine with your meal? (you like wine your meal)

The train to Southampton will depart at 6.30 (train Southampton depart 6.30)

The girl kicked the boy on the knee (girl kick boy knee)

Reordering words in a sentence

Make a list of sentences that use the target language, mix up the words, and ask your student to put the words in the correct order. This can be quickly and easily done on an online whiteboard by typing each word as a separate object, words which the student can then move around until they think it's in the correct order. Here's an example that practises the use of the present continuous. The jumbled sentence might be:

forest was girl through the the little walking

And the correctly re-ordered sentence:

The little girl was walking through the forest

Dictogloss

A dictogloss is actually a writing activity, but it also forces students to pay attention to grammatical features in texts. For more information, refer to the previous chapter on writing for more.

Many English teachers, especially native speakers of the language, often have a hard time explaining grammar. If you're brought up with the language, grammar often seems the way it is because, well, it just is that way. This kind of explanation is no good for our students, of course. But if you can't explain it, don't worry, don't fret and, most importantly, don't make it up. Just tell your student you'll get back to them and after the lesson check it out on the Internet; there are hundreds of great websites that do a fantastic job of explaining grammar in a way that even native speakers can understand!

Explaining Grammar Visually

Personally, my favourite way of explaining grammar (if I really have to) is to use visuals, in particular timelines and clines. Timelines are a great way of explaining verb tenses. Draw a line, mark "now" somewhere in the middle, and write a sentence, such as "we went to London"; you can mark this on the timeline at some point to the left of "now" (i.e. in the past) with a cross. If the sentence were "we were going to Paris when it started raining", you can mark "were going" on the timeline with a long wavy line, to show that the journey went on for some time, while "started raining" could be marked with a cross towards the end of the wavy line. We've put some examples of timelines on our companion website, theonlineenglishteacher.com.

A great way of showing degrees of difference between words is to use a cline. Clines are simply a line on to which you can place words according to the differences between them. So if you wanted to teach your student adjectives similar to “good”, you could put “good” at one end of the line, “excellent” at the other end and “very good” somewhere in the middle. You could also add words like “fantastic”, “awesome” and “ok” to the cline.

Here is a list of words: where would you put these on a line scaled between 0% and 100%? Often, never, always, usually, sometimes, rarely, occasionally, seldom.

Grammar checklist

- teach grammar in the context of something meaningful
- students learn grammar through lots of exposure to language, but they also have to ‘notice’ the grammar
- give your student feedback in the form of recasting and reformulation
- grammar is important: it makes meaning clearer
- try explaining grammar visually

Section 8

How to teach vocabulary

Vocabulary is one of the most important tools a learner has when starting to use a foreign language. We can strip away grammar entirely and still be understood by using words together. If I said to you 'hungry food eat' you would probably guess exactly what I wanted. Yet, if we strip the words from the grammar, language is meaningless 'I want to...' Most of us think of vocabulary as single words, but what is vocabulary really?

Am I teaching grammar or vocabulary?

So, the most fundamental issue to cover here is to assess exactly what we mean by vocabulary. Let's look at Jenny's notes for her lesson today. The title of her lesson is 'getting around town'.

Getting around town

Vocabulary for today: train, bus, taxi, bicycle, car; get on, get in; drive, cycle, ride, walk; it's a stone's throw away

In Jenny's lesson, she decides to teach modes of transportation, she also decides to teach vocabulary connected to these modes such as 'get on', 'she got on the bus'. Jenny looks at some common verbs connected with travel and finally she has an idiom 'A stone's throw away'. So by looking at her lesson above, what do you now think of as vocabulary?

Vocabulary can be:

- ➔ A single word
- ➔ Words combined to produce a single chunk of meaning

Extracting vocabulary

Look at the letter below that an English teacher has chosen to use in his lesson today:

Dear Sir or Madam:

I am writing with regards to the telephone conversation we had today. As you know, we have planned to meet in the afternoon on the 6th of July. Unfortunately, I am unable to attend this meeting due to a prior arrangement that had been miscommunicated to me by my secretary. Please accept my sincerest apologies.

Regards, Richard Watts

What words would you teach your learner from the letter above? What grammar would you teach them? When approaching a piece of language in context we must become accustomed to extracting language for our learners. Let's look at two teacher's interpretations of this lesson below:

Catherine has chosen to teach the following items of vocabulary: regards (n), unfortunately (adv.), unable (adj.), prior (adj.), arrangement (n.), miscommunicated (v.)

In her plan, Catherine will show her student the letter and ask him to read it; then she will ask him questions about the letter before looking at the vocabulary above. She will then write the list of words on an online whiteboard and ask her student to discuss the meanings with her. She will then explain the meanings of the words herself to her student who will make notes in his notebook. Her students will then have a practice activity using the words. Well, that's the plan, anyway!

In Catherine's lesson, suddenly a problem occurs. She can't explain the meaning of the word 'regards'. Can you? In a dictionary the definition of this word is:

To consider or think of in a specialized way, or relating to.

Which isn't much help! She then teaches the word 'Prior'. Catherine gets a little nervous explaining this word, and tells her student it means 'before'. Can we use this word in all situations to mean 'before'?

Catherine becomes a little bogged down by the language she has chosen and her student goes away with the new words but with no real idea of their proper use.

Now let's look at Russell's lesson. Russell looks at the letter and he chooses the following vocabulary to teach: I am writing with regards to, telephone conversation, as you know, to be unable to (do something), a prior arrangement, to miscommunicate (something)

As you can see, Russell has chosen blocks of language rather than single words for the most part. English teaching professionals usually refer to these blocks of language as 'chunks'. So, we

looked at Catherine above trying to explain the meaning of ‘regards’ above. In Russell’s lesson how do you think he explained the meaning of ‘I am writing with regards to...’? Maybe he explained it as:

I am writing this letter about...

This is the reason I’m writing this letter...

‘With regards to’ means ‘about’

As you can see, the language in Russell’s lesson is a lot more useful to the learners than in Catherine’s lesson. It is also a lot easier for Russell to teach!

Look at the dialogue below for an intermediate student and see if you can pick out useful vocabulary to teach in your lesson. In this dialogue, Claire is talking to her mother and deciding what to take on her holiday to Scotland.

Claire: Mum! What should I take? I’ve got so many clothes and so much stuff!
Mum: Oh Claire, What a mess! Your clothes are all over the place. Can you try and organize yourself a little?
Claire: Mum! We’ve already been over this, It’s my bedroom and I can make a mess if I want!
Mum: OK OK, well, how about taking those skirts over there, they are nice. Oh and you should take your jacket, it might get a little cold.
Claire: Yeah, you’re right, Oh, and I could take my nice jeans too, and I must take my camera!
Mum: And you...

So, how did you do? Maybe you have decided to teach clothing items, rooms of the house and maybe even family vocabulary. With regards to the actual script itself, which bits of language did you extract? These are the items of vocabulary that I chose: what a mess! (Your clothes) are all over the place, to organize yourself, to go over something (We have already been over this), to make a mess.

Explaining vocabulary

Look at the following conversation between Catherine and her student:

Michiko: What is the meaning of... erm... dream?

Catherine: Oh, ok, right, well it means something you do when you are asleep, it's like, when you are asleep and are thinking about something but in the morning you can't remember. When you are unconscious and sleeping... yeah.

Michiko: When... I... sleeping... uncon...ious.

Catherine: Yeah, you know, when you are sleeping and don't know what is happening, like, if I sleep tonight and imagine I'm snowboarding down a beautiful mountain!

Michiko: dream... snowboarding?

Catherine: Yeah, when you sleep, you know.

Michiko: So this sentence 'I'm dreaming about buying a new car' means I am sleeping?

Catherine: Oh no! Sorry, it means...

What a mess! Poor Michiko is probably more confused about the word now than when she started the lesson. So how would Catherine make Michiko's life easier as well as her own? Look at the different ways of teaching vocabulary below:

Use pictures

One of the basic tools of the classroom teacher is to use flashcards. Flashcards are simply big cards with pictures on them, which teachers show to their class. They're a great teaching tool, but they often get lost, most schools have a limited range of flashcards and it's hard to find a specific flashcard amongst a pile of hundreds. The Online English Teacher, however, has a big advantage over classroom teachers because we have an almost unlimited and completely free source of flashcards: it's called Google Images.

So to explain the word, dream, you can search Google Images for an appropriate image, perhaps someone sleeping with a thought bubble coming out of their head, in which they are lying on a beach; to show the idea of a dream as something you really want, find an image of someone awake with a thought bubble coming out of their head, in which there is a car. With Google Images, these pictures can be found during a lesson - no need to dash back to the staff room, hunt down a box of flashcards and then sift through them to find a picture of a dream! Simply send your student a link to the image, upload it to an online whiteboard or share your screen and show them the picture.

Alternatively, just draw the picture on an online whiteboard. To revise words, tell your student a word and ask them to draw it. Even stickman skills can work here!

Mime

Miming can be a really fun and effective way of teaching language. For example if the word I'm trying to teach is 'driving', rather than try to explain the word, I can just pretend that I'm driving a car.

Using a dictionary

If the word is fairly abstract and difficult to explain, allow your learner to use a dictionary. Also, feel free to use a dictionary yourself, remember, explaining vocabulary can be extremely difficult, even for a native speaker of a language. When using a dictionary in the class, try to have your learner use an English to English dictionary rather than an English translated dictionary. This will help them more in the long term.

Place the word into context

Let's imagine we are teaching the word 'live'. If you try to explain the raw meaning of the word, it becomes very difficult. This word also has a few different meanings. So in this case, maybe we could put the word into a sentence for our student, 'I live in a house, I live in Bangkok, I live in Thailand'.

Realia

If you are teaching the word 'newspaper', why not just show your student a real newspaper? If you're teaching your student household objects and you're using a laptop or a tablet computer, walk around your house and point the camera at whatever household objects you stumble across. Clutter can be a great teaching tool!

This list can go on and on, the only limit is your own creativity, so experiment. You will find that some of your students like a visual interpretation of things whereas some may prefer to listen to an explanation. It doesn't matter; the most important thing is that they walk away with the correct meaning of the word. So how would you teach Michiko the meaning of the word 'dream'?

Presenting new language

As a teacher, you will have to decide how much information about a particular piece of language your student may require. And as you gain more experience this will become easier and easier. Let's look at the information a particular piece of language may have:

- ➔ Is it a verb, noun, adjective, adverb, expression, idiom and so on?
- ➔ Does it have a preposition? e.g. to dream (about) something.
- ➔ How many syllables does it contain? E.g. computer, com pu ter, three syllables.

- ➔ Where is the stress in the word? e.g. computer, stress on the middle syllable.
- ➔ Does it have multiple meanings? e.g. live, I live in a house, there is a live band.
- ➔ Does it require capitalization? e.g. Oxford Street.
- ➔ Can the word change? e.g. go/going/gone/been/went.
- ➔ How is the word pronounced?
- ➔ Is the word common in the English language? E.g. the 'door' is very common, but how about the word 'tartan'?
- ➔ Is the item used only in a specific context? E.g. who would say 'board the plane' and who would say 'get on the plane'?
- ➔ Is the item of language formal, neutral, or informal? E.g. get wasted/get drunk/become inebriated.

As you can see, there is a lot of information a single word may contain. Do we need to give our learner all of it? Absolutely not, but we must consider what is important for our learners to use it effectively. So if we were going to teach our learners the word 'dream' to talk about future aspirations, then it would be advisable to teach them the preposition 'about' to accompany it. Also, what follows that preposition?

I dream about opening my own business

So for the example above, I'm going to teach the meaning of the word and then how it is used:

To dream (about) + gerund (ing).

Before teaching a lesson that includes a section of vocabulary, take the time to make a list of the items you are going to teach and research the meanings using a dictionary of some sort. Preparation in the key here.

Emergent language: do's and don'ts

Sometimes during a lesson, it is inevitable that words will just crop up, or your learner has discovered a new word him or herself and would like you to explain it. So what should we do?

Do: If you feel confident explaining the word, explain it.

Do: Allow yourself and the student to use a good dictionary.

Do: Give examples of the word being used rather than go into long explanations of the meaning.

Do: Encourage the learner to find the meaning themselves after the lesson, in order to bring to you the next lesson.

Do: If you don't feel confident explaining the language, tell the learner that you don't have time in this lesson, but you will get back to them in the next lesson.

Don't try to explain something you don't truly understand yourself.

Don't skip by the subject and ignore your learner's request.

Activities for learning vocabulary

Matching

Take the list of words you would like to teach in your lesson and write simple meanings for each. Jumble the words and ask the learner to match the words to the meanings.

For example, here are four words and four definitions. Can you match each word to its correct definition?

Butcher, café, hospital, zoo.

A place that sells coffee and snacks

A place where we can see many animals

A place where you can buy meat

A place you go if you are sick

Either type the words and definitions into an online whiteboard, or type them into Skype's text conversation box. If you use an online whiteboard, your student can move the definitions around until they are next to the appropriate word.

Alternatively, try matching words to pictures, words to paragraphs, words to the opposite meanings and so on.

Gap fills

In this next activity the learner is asked to place all of the relevant words into the correct gaps:

Butcher, hospital, zoo, café.

I went to the _____ to buy some meat.

I went to the _____ to buy a cup of coffee.

I went to the _____ to see my sick sister.

I went to the _____ to see the animals.

Again, you can use an online whiteboard for this. Type the missing words as separate text boxes and your student can drag the words into the gaps.

Mind Maps

Draw a word in the middle of an online whiteboard and allow your student to brainstorm words connected. So for example in the middle of the screen we could write the word 'transport' and then we would give our learner time to add to the whiteboard as many words connected to this as possible such as, train, bus, car, pollution, electric and so on.

Lists: categorizing and sorting

Give headings and ask your learner to put the vocabulary under the correct heading. For example, you could type two headings, 'outdoor activities' and 'indoor activities' into an online whiteboard, and then type a number of activities (e.g. swimming, running, having a picnic, watching a movie, doing yoga); your student then drags the activities under the correct headings.

An alternative to this listing activity is a sorting activity. You could ask your student to sort these activities into the order in which they like to do them. Or if you were doing types of transport, your student could sort them from fastest to quickest, or from most comfortable to least comfortable, or from expensive to cheap; there are lots of different possibilities. You can then ask your student to explain why they have put the words into this order.

Anagrams

Maybe you remember these from your own schooling. Easy to prepare, and fun for your learner. Simply jumble up the letters in a word and ask your student to unscramble them. Here is the activities vocabulary from above. Can you unscramble them?

ginwsimm
nningur
inghav a icpnic
wtchinga a viemo
ingdo gayo

The activities above are useful and practical ways to take to your online lessons but remember the real fun comes with your creativity as the language teacher. Try new ideas, research games and activities and always keep things fresh. Oh, and don't forget hangman!

Vocabulary checklist

- Choose vocabulary for your lesson carefully; remember vocabulary does not necessarily mean single words.
- Avoid giving explanations if you don't know the word yourself.
- Use dictionaries and if possible encourage your learner to use an English to English dictionary.
- Don't just give the words alone; give the learner the context and an example of the language in use.
- Have fun; learning vocabulary is one of the most rewarding areas of any language.

Section 9

How to teach pronunciation

Ask any teacher of English about teaching pronunciation and they will probably wince. In my experience, it is usually the last component to come into the language teacher's expertise. The reason for this is because you are faced with analysing something you have never thought about before. If I were to ask you to tell me where the stress comes in the word 'Pistachios', could you tell me? If I asked you where the main stress in the sentence 'I sometimes enjoy going to the cinema but more often than not I will watch a movie at home' was, would you know the answer? Where does the question 'Where are you from?' rise and fall? In fact, what is the meaning of the word 'stress' when we talk about pronunciation?

Good pronunciation is vital because it helps understanding. In fact, the major cause of breakdowns in communication between two people is not grammatical mistakes, nor is it a lack of vocabulary, it's bad pronunciation. English language learners can usually be understood even if their speech is littered with grammatical mistakes (e.g. yesterday I go zoo...), and they can usually find some way of expressing meaning, however imprecise, even with a limited vocabulary (...and I see big cat). However, if they say something grammatically correct with great vocabulary, it's no good if you can't understand what they're trying to say. Teaching pronunciation is therefore an extremely important part of the language learner's experience and should never be shied away from. So let's look at the basics of pronunciation.

What is stress?

We use stress in words and in sentences. Let's take a look at how stress affects a word. I have chosen the word 'policeman'. Firstly, how many syllables does the word have?

Po lice man

The word policeman has three syllables. Now try saying the word a few times and focus on which syllable of the word has more strength or force.

Po LICE man

Notice how we accentuate the second syllable. Try saying the word now but make the first syllable stronger. Do you notice how odd the word now sounds? This strength in the word is called the stress. Look at the words below and notice where the stress on each word lies.

When we teach new words to our students it is important to model the pronunciation for them in order for them to speak the word correctly. Later on we will discuss strategies to help our learners have the best possible chance of doing this.

What is sentence stress?

Like word stress, sentence stress contains a louder or stronger sound. In a word, we have to decipher which syllable is being stressed whereas, in a sentence we are trying to hear which word or part of the sentence is being stressed. Look at the sentence below:

I love to go shopping at the weekend.

Try saying this sentence enthusiastically a few times. Which word sounds stronger in the sentence? You probably said the word 'love' which is generally correct. Now trying stressing the word 'weekend' in the sentence. Notice how the meaning changes in the sentence:

I LOVE to go shopping at the weekend

In this sentence the speaker is emphasizing how much they like to shop.

I love to go shopping at the WEEKEND

In this sentence the speaker is emphasizing that he likes to shop at the weekend and not on another day.

I love to go SHOPPING at the weekend

In this sentence, the speaker is emphasizing that, at the weekend, he likes to go shopping, rather than something else like playing football or reading.

When we practice speaking sentences with our learners it is very important to think carefully about the stress and to correct the learner if their stress is inappropriate because all of this affects the meaning of sentences.

What is intonation?

Intonation is the way in which we 'sing' the language. The rise and fall of the sentence that can indicate how we feel, or convey different meanings in the same utterance. Let's have a look at a couple of examples:

Conversation 1

John: I met a great looking girl last night, she was amazing!

Nick: Seriously? What did she look like?

Conversation 2

John: I met a great looking girl last night, she was amazing!

Nick: Seriously? You never meet great looking girls John.

Firstly, try speaking both conversations to yourself, what difference do you notice? Notice that in the first conversation, Nick feels excited for his friend, the way he says the word ‘seriously’ will be quick and will rise at the end. In the second conversation, Nick is being sarcastic and the way he says ‘seriously’ will be slower and will rise and then fall at the end. So, not only are our students learning the meaning of words and phrases but must also learn how to use the language to correctly express themselves.

What is linking?

Linking refers to sounds merging together. When we speak naturally at a fast pace we do not pronounce each word perfectly. Words connect and form single units of sound. Look at the question below:

What did you do yesterday?

Try saying these words one by one slowly. Now speed up and say them together at a natural speed. Do you notice how the words change and merge together? You probably said something like this:

Whadija do yesterday?

If our learners are to understand other people speaking naturally, they need to become aware of this. Try writing a few sentences down and then speak them at a regular speed. Are there any sounds that you notice linking together?

Students’ individual problems

There is no doubt that as you become more experienced as an online teacher you will come across people from all over the world, each with their own first language. One thing to really take into account then, is that every nationality will have its own common problems with the English language.

For example a typical Japanese speaker will usually have problems pronouncing the sounds 'r' and 'l' in English, as the 'r' sound does not exist in Japanese.

I lun aloud the park everly day

rather than

I run around the park every day

A typical Thai speaker will have a problem with the sounds 'ch' and 'sh', and they will often make vowel sounds too long.

A bag of feesh and sheeps

rather than

A bag of fish and chips

Russian speakers will often have difficulty with the 'h' sound because it doesn't exist in Russian. They often replace it with a 'g' or a 'kh' (as in loch) sound.

Gary Potter wears a big khat.

rather than

Harry Potter wears a big hat.

As you get to know your students, it is worth identifying these problems and working on them. The internet has a great source information regarding individual learner errors and it is advisable before meeting your student for the first time to investigate the kind of problems they probably encounter in English. Having this kind of knowledge right from the start will enable you to better understand your student, make a better impression and provide the best possible service.

How to help your learner

Drilling

Drilling is probably the most tried and tested technique to help students with their pronunciation. This is simply the act of speak and repeat and is probably the first thing someone thinks of when they think of a typical English language classroom. Drilling can be very scary for the teacher who has never done it before, but you will soon be very surprised how natural it is for the learner. Look at the conversation below between Justin and his student Niko.

Justin: OK Niko, are you ready? Listen and repeat.
 Niko: OK
 Justin: I use a computer every day
 Niko: I use... a... computer... every day
 Justin: I use a computer every day
 Niko: I use a... computer... every day
 Justin: I use a telephone at work
 Niko: I use a...
 Justin: I use a telephone at work
 Niko: I use... a telephone... at work
 Justin: Well done! One more time...

Notice in the conversation above that Justin models the new words ‘telephone’ and ‘computer’ in a sentence rather than modelling them alone. This is a useful technique to employ and will help your learners both hear and produce new words in a context. As Justin models the sentence he notices that Niko is stressing the first syllable on the word computer. Let’s look at how Justin helps Niko with this.

Justin: I use my computer at work
 Niko: I use my COMputer at work
 Justin: comPUter
 Niko: COMPUTer
 Justin: com PUT er
 Niko: comPUTer
 Justin: Excellent. I use my comPUTer at work
 Niko: I use my comPUTer at work
 Justin: Well done!

In the conversation above Justin accentuates the stressed syllable. He makes it louder on purpose so it becomes clear to his student, where the stress lies.

Drilling with your hands

Your hands can be your secret weapon with pronunciation. When demonstrating a word such as ‘computer’, hold up your hand so your student can clearly see your fingers and count the syllables on your fingers as you model the pronunciation. Touching a finger for each syllable com put er. The stress on this word is on the second syllable, so when you hit this one, wiggle your

finger a little to point it out. This may sound a little silly but it can really help your learner. Think about employing the same techniques with intonation. When the sentence rises, what could you do with your hands? How about when the sentence falls?

Chanting

Chanting may seem a little old fashioned to some, but it is a really effective way of drilling pronunciation. Chants are memorable, have a strong rhythm and are fun. Try a search on the internet for chants in English, you will be surprised how much information you can find.

Back-chaining

A great little way to help your learners is by back-chaining a sentence. Let's imagine Justin is practicing the sentence 'I use a computer every day' with his learner. Look at the following conversation:

Justin: OK, Nico, are you ready?
Nico: Yes
Justin: day
Nico: day
Justin: every day
Nico: every day
Justin: computer every day
Nico: computer every day
Justin: a computer every day
Nico: a computer every day
Justin: use a computer every day
Nico: use a computer every day
Justin: I use a computer every day
Nico: I use a computer every day
Justin: Great work Nico.

Adding one word at a time from the back each time is a very effective tool. Try different approaches to this like going faster, going slowly, accentuating the stressed word, and so on. The key as usual is to be creative and experiment.

Comparing confusing sound 'pairs'

Give your student plenty of practice saying confusing word pairs, so that they get to notice the differences between them. For example, can they hear the difference between the long and short 'i' in pairs like live-leave, sit-seat, fit-feet, hit-heat, ship-sheep; can they hear the difference

between the 'sh' and 'ch' sounds in ship-chip, shoe-chew. Can they then make the difference clear in their speech?

Should my student sound like a native English speaker?

The quick answer to this is no. In fact, unless someone has started learning English at a very early age in an English speaking environment, they are unlikely to end up speaking with, say, an English or an Australian accent anyway. A Russian will always have a Russian twang to his accent when speaking English; Chinese people will always have a distinct Chinese twang to their accent when speaking English. The most important thing is that your learner can be understood by other people. In any case, nowadays, English is such a global language that it's difficult to point to what is correct pronunciation. Remember, that you are not trying to teach an accent, you are trying to help your student to communicate in English.

Getting used to your student

As we teach our learners for a period of time we become accustomed to their accent and way of speaking. The learners become more understandable simply because of this. Consider this carefully when you are teaching. Always ask yourself whether others would be able to understand your student and if not, how could I help them with this pronunciation gap. As a rule of thumb, I always keep a pronunciation focus in every one of my lessons, and for one hour, a few minutes should be dedicated to pronunciation work.

Pronunciation checklist

- Don't skip it! Pronunciation is an essential part of communication.
- Get used to hearing sounds in English yourself, you will find that the more you teach pronunciation, the more you will notice it yourself.
- Be creative, use your voice, hands and fingers to signal points such as stress and intonation.
- Try to keep the practice light-hearted and fun.

Section 10

Putting it all together

So, we have talked about teaching skills like speaking, listening, writing and so on, but how do you put it all together? Let's look at what a typical English lesson may look like from start to finish. Look at the lesson framework below.

1. Warmer

Purpose: To literally 'warm up' the learner, like stretching in the gym. Get the student speaking and begin to activate their language learning head.

Activity: In a one to one setting this could be a short chat about the weekend,, the weather or something that happened during the previous week. With a younger learner, this may be a game such as hangman.

Time: 3 to 5 minutes

2. Lead – in

Purpose: To generate interest in the topic of the lesson today and to activate that area of language in the brain that the learner will come across in the lesson.

Activity: Discuss the topic with the learner. You will probably have two or three questions related to the topic at this stage already prepared to ask. Let's imagine we are going to teach a lesson called 'going to the doctors'. Our questions might be: 'Do you like going to the doctors? Why/Why not?' 'When was the last time you went to the doctors? What was wrong?'

Time: 3 to 5 minutes

3. Receptive tasks

Purpose: This will usually be a listening or reading activity: a recording from a coursebook CD, a clip from YouTube or Vimeo, a clip from one of the British Council's audio resources, a news article and so on (see our Resources and Materials section in part 3 of the book for more sources of listening and reading material). This will usually contain the language focus of the lesson today. So, using our 'going to the doctors' example once more, it may be a recording of a man in a doctor's office explaining what is wrong with him.

Activity 1: We would begin this stage by predicting the content. One way would be to show the student a picture of the scenario and ask them to guess what the listening will be about.

Activity 2: The student will listen to the recording and see if their predictions were correct.

Activity 3: The learner will now listen again, but there will be a more difficult task. Tasks such as comprehension questions are usually seen at this point in a lesson. The student feeds back to the teacher at the end of the activity.

Activity 4: Repeat activity 3 if the recording was difficult.

Activity 5: Overall feedback of the material. Teacher can ask such questions as ‘What do you remember from the recording?’ ‘What did you like about it?’ ‘Did you agree with the doctor?’

Time: Between 10 – 20 minutes

4. Noticing tasks

Purpose: This is the stage where your student will be learning new words, grammatical structures, fixed phrases and so on. Again using our example ‘going to the doctors’ we will probably be focusing on modal verbs here, e.g. you should take some medicine, you must get more rest, you have to do more exercise, you ought to take vitamins.

Activity: We do not usually want to just ‘give’ the students the language. A good activity for the above example may be for the learner to go through the transcript of the recording and underline the recommendations the doctor gives. Students can add to the list and teachers can input further language at this stage. Activities such as matching sentences, gap fills, and definition matching are commonly seen at this stage.

Time: about 10 minutes

5. Production task (Controlled)

Purpose: At this point we want our learners to try and use this new language they have learned. Notice that the task says it is ‘controlled’. At this point we want our students to produce the language in a clear context and supported strongly by the teacher.

Activity: Using the example above, the student may be given a list of symptom they must go to the doctor with. Another student or the teacher will play the part of the doctor, but will have specific items to suggest to the patient written down. The roles will then swap.

The students are very confined at this point and are unable to really bring themselves into the task fully. We are focusing on the language solely and will want to iron out any mistakes at this point.

Time: about 10 minutes

6. Pronunciation

Purpose: So, we have learned some new language and now it is time to speak it correctly. Your student may or may not already be pronouncing the language correctly, this is up to you as the teacher to decide.

Activity: Drill the new language in sentences. Different types of listen and repeat activities can be used here and there should be a real focus on getting the target language correct.

Time: about 5 minutes

7. Production task (free)

Purpose: This is what your student has been waiting for. This is the point in the lesson where your learner is free to use the language learned in the lesson in a much freer environment. This will usually also relate much more to real life and especially directly to your learner's day to day life outside of the classroom.

Activity: So, once again taking the example from previously. We would probably set up an activity where the learner writes down three things that is wrong in their life right now. The teacher can give examples such as 'I have too much homework to do' 'I need to lose weight' 'I can't sleep at night'. The students will then read their problems to the teacher and the teacher will give advice using the modal verbs learned in the lesson. The teacher and student will then swap roles.

Time: 10 – 20 minutes

8. Feedback

Purpose: To reflect upon the lesson and answer any questions the student may have regarding the lesson material. We can also discuss the next lesson and give homework at this point.

Activity: A nice way to do this is to ask the learner what they have learned in today's lesson. The teacher may want to go through points in the lesson to remember and chat generally about the topic. This works well as an informal chat.

Time: About 5 minutes

9. Cooler

Purpose: Somebody once told me the most important thing you can do in a lesson is to send your students out with a smile. This is a chance to just have a little fun at the end of a class. Treat it as a reward for the hard work your student has done in the lesson.

Activity: This could be a simple chat, e.g. 'What are you going to do after the lesson today?' or something more fun such as a little game. I have always liked to play the 'What am I?' game. I'm colourful, I live in a tree and I can speak! What am I?

Time: About 3 – 5 minutes

Section 11

Quick activities

Here are a bunch of quick 1 to 10 minute activities that you can throw into your lessons, perhaps as a warmer or as a filler activity if you run out of time. The activities may sound like the kind of things you would do with children, but don't forget that teenagers and adults love to have fun too!

Guess the picture

Go to an online whiteboard, like IDroo or Twiddla. Draw a small part of a picture. Ask your student what they think it is going to be. You can also help them to reformulate their responses if needed (e.g. "I think that it is going to be a....", "it could be a..."). Encourage them to give different opinions but don't tell them if they are right or wrong. Add a little more to the drawing and encourage them to give more responses until you have drawn the picture.

20 Questions

Choose a word you have recently used with your student. They must try to guess the word by asking yes/no questions. Give them 20 questions to guess.

Word snake

Write a word on your online whiteboard. Now, ask your student to write another word, but starting with the last letter of your word. For example, if you wrote 'elephant', your student must write a word beginning with 't' such as 'tired'. Now you add a word, starting with the last letter of your student's word, (e.g. dream') and so on, taking it in turns to make the word snake longer. Encourage your student to think of long words by making it a competition between you and your student to see who can add the most letters to the snake (but let your student win!)

This works best on a tablet, because as the snake gets longer you can turn the tablet upside down as you build the snake. If you're using a desktop computer, just start a new snake when you reach the edge of the screen (unless, that is, both you and your student don't mind standing on your head!). Word snakes can also be done using Skype's chat box, of course, but it looks better on a whiteboard.

As a follow up, ask your student to make up sentences using words in the word snake.

Story tennis

Start to tell your student a story, perhaps based on one you have just read. Your student now has to add a sentence to the story. Then you add a sentence. Take it in turns like this until you have a completed story. This can be used either as a speaking or writing activity.

Correcting mistakes

Students make lots of mistakes when learning English, but often this is because, in the challenge of real time communication, they have forgotten some aspect of language rather than because they didn't know the language in the first place. This means that students are often able to correct any mistakes they make.

You can type a few sentences into Skype or on to an online whiteboard which have mistakes in them, either the kind of mistakes your student is making or the kind of mistakes typical of students at your student's level. Here are a few examples of the kind of errors students at different proficiency levels make:

Typical Elementary Mistakes

He like pizza.

She taked the pen.

I am go to work.

I not go to school.

Where is the boy go?

What you eat?

Yesterday I am tired.

I must to drink water.

He live in the France

Typical Intermediate Mistakes

He asked me where am I going

I am waiting here since five o'clock.

The money was stole by a thief.

He drove slowly the car.

I go shopping yesterday.

Growing sentences

Write a verb on an online whiteboard, or type it into Skype's text conversation box. For example, the word "eat". Your student needs to add a word or two (e.g. "a pizza") to make a sentence. You can either add another word yourself or you can ask your student to add another word to the sentence. Each longer sentence should make sense and be grammatically correct. For example:

Eat!

Eat a pizza!

Eat a delicious pizza!

I want to eat a delicious pizza.

I want to eat a delicious cheese pizza.

"I want to eat a delicious cheese pizza" said my sister.

Odd one out

Write four words into Skype's chat box, or on to an online whiteboard, or simply read out the words. Ask your student to tell you the odd one out, and to tell you why it's the odd one out. Here are some examples – which ones do you think are the odd one out? There are often more than one possibility!

horse, pony, donkey, unicorn

Japan, Thailand, Tokyo, Vietnam, Italy

car, helicopter, train, bicycle, bus

Picture dictation

Find a picture with lots of action happening in it – ideally this should be from the Internet or, if you are using one, a coursebook. Describe the picture to your student. Your student draws the picture, either on a piece of paper (which they can show to you on a webcam) or on an online whiteboard. After they have finished drawing, your student can compare their drawing with the one you were describing. Alternatively, you can ask your student to describe the picture back to

you – have they missed any details? If you want, you can reverse the activity, with your student describing a picture to you, which you must draw.

Substitutes

Type a sentence for your student to see, such as “yesterday, I went for a walk in the woods with my dog.” This is best done on an online whiteboard. Delete one or two words and ask your student to think of different words to go in the spaces. Your student should add new words so that it still makes sense and so that the sentence is still grammatical. Alternatively, you can let your student decide which word or words to change, and you could also take it in turns to change the words.

Yesterday, I went for a walk in the woods with my dog.

This morning, I went for a walk in the woods with my dog.

This morning, I went for a walk in the park with my dog.

This morning, I went for a walk in the park with my girlfriend.

This morning, I went for a run in the park with my girlfriend.

Hangman

A perennial favourite! It works great on an online whiteboard!

How to do exam preparation

In section one, we talked about the benefits of focusing your teaching on exam preparation. We also gave you a breakdown of some of the most popular and most prestigious examinations, such as the IELTS, TOEFL and TOEIC. In this chapter we thought we'd include some tips on how to run lessons that prepare students for these exams.

The most important thing to say is that the student should be given opportunities to practise in lessons what they are expected to do in the exams. So if the exam requires them to say whether a list of statements based on a listening text is true or false, then practise this during lessons. If they have to read long, complicated texts and then do multiple choice comprehension exercises based on this reading text, then practise this during lessons. If they have to write a 200 word text giving opinions, practise this during lessons. This sounds like 'teaching to the test', and it is, but exercises in exams often require quite specific skills, and the only way to ensure your student gets the highest possible score is to give them practice, guidance and feedback developing these skills.

This also means that if you are going to offer lessons in exam preparation, you need to become familiar with the exams. Fortunately, you can find lots of sample papers from many exams on the Internet, or in books.

Examples of exam-specific skills:

- ➔ Answering multiple choice comprehension questions
- ➔ Choosing words or phrases to fill gaps in a sentence or text
- ➔ Deciding if a statement is true or false
- ➔ Writing an essay of a specific length in a specific time
- ➔ Listening to a recording of an unfamiliar voice
- ➔ Reading long passages full of unknown words and answering questions on it

You don't need to do just exam-style activities though. It's a good idea to include activities not directly related to the exams; simply doing exam-style activities can quickly get boring and, in

any case, doing more general English activities, such as vocabulary development, will ultimately help them in the exam, especially if they are focussed on areas in which they are having difficulty. If you were running, say, an 10 week course for a student preparing them for taking the IELTS exam, you could spend the first couple of weeks on general language learning to ensure they have a firm base on which to build, then work on specific language difficulties they might have, before doing activities more closely related to the exam itself, finally moving on to actual timed examination practice.

Activity Ideas

Student Questions

Give your student a text (similar to one they might find in an exam) and ask your student to make up some questions about it for you, the teacher, to answer. Their questions should be in a similar style to questions they would see in the exam. They could write the questions as a homework task, or, once they had become more familiar with the question style of the exam, make up the questions during the lesson. Then you need to answer the questions posed by your student... but get one or two wrong! This will then force the student to explain to you why you were wrong.

Student Marking

It's important for the student to be familiar with the way written work is assessed in an exam. When people assess written work, they use a marking scheme, and these marking schemes are usually available for download. Marking schemes tell the examiner what scores to give a piece of writing based on criteria like punctuation, spelling, accurate grammar and how they have put across their ideas. A student who understands these marking criteria will know what to include in order to get the best possible grade. One activity which will raise a student's familiarity with marking schemes is to give them a copy of the marking scheme and ask them to grade a piece of writing based on it. You can do this with them, and discuss the good and bad points of a piece of writing.

The IELTS

We briefly mentioned the IELTS exam in section 1, but it deserves a bigger mention here as it is, we believe, ideally suited for online teachers and for online students for several reasons:

- ➔ It's a niche product so it's easier to find students and market yourself;
- ➔ Lots of students take the IELTS: over 2 million in 2013;
- ➔ The IELTS opens up huge opportunities for people; a good score on the IELTS helps them gain entry into universities in English-speaking countries and also to live and work in those countries, so doing well on the IELTS is life-changing; it's a high value product;

- ➔ Preparing a test prep lesson is more straightforward than preparing a lesson on general English because the test itself dictates a lot of what you will do in lessons;
- ➔ There are lots of IELTS prep materials and information about the IELTS online, and lots of coursebooks available in bookshops around the world;

Many students preparing for the IELTS (The International English Language Testing System) will pay a lot of money to do a preparation course with a classroom full of other students. While these courses can be good in a general sense, it is difficult for even the best teachers to give each student the kind of individual feedback they need in order to do well in the exam. This is where the kind of one-to-one tuition, that the Online English Teacher can offer, has a major advantage. And success on the IELTS which, remember, is potentially life-changing, can often be a fine line. The IELTS isn't a pass or fail exam: instead you get a score on a scale of 1 to 9, and scores can be reported as whole numbers or halves, such as 6.5, 7.0, 7.5 or 8.0. Someone with a score of 9.0 is regarded as an expert user of English; someone with a score of 1.0 is someone only able to use words in isolation. Many universities in the UK require a minimum score of 6.5 for entry to an undergraduate degree course, but this is usually higher for postgraduate degrees and more linguistically-demanding courses such as medicine and law; some will offer a university place for a lower score on condition they enrol on an expensive pre-entry English course. So getting a slightly higher score is crucial for both academic and financial reasons. The IELTS score is valid for two years, meaning many students take it several times, either when their old score lapses or in order to get a higher score.

There are actually two types of IELTS exam: a general IELTS and an academic IELTS. The listening and speaking tasks in these exams are the same, but the reading and writing tasks are different; for example, on the academic exam, students will have to write formal academic essays on academic subjects while in the general exam, students write a letter and a discussion text.

The reading tasks do need lots of practice because students are expected to read and understand quite lengthy texts in a very limited time. This means they need to practise reading quickly in order to get an understanding at a text and paragraph level, rather than by trying to slowly understand every word and every sentence.

There is a mine of information about the IELTS exam on the IELTS' official page at www.ielts.org or simply google "IELTS" and you will find more...lots more.

Tips and hints

If you do find yourself in a situation where a student would like to study for an exam try the following tips to help you as the teacher, guide your student effectively:

Take the exam yourself! The best way of finding out what your learner will have to do is by simply doing it yourself. You can find example sample test materials for any major English language exam online and in good bookstores.

Learn and study the different kinds of questions that your student will have to face. Will the learner have to match titles to paragraphs? Will they have to write essays? Will they have to listen to lectures? Do your homework, find out exactly what your students need to practise.

Know your learner. Before you begin to teach your learner, give them an example of the exam and ask them to do it under timed conditions. After marking it, it should become clear which areas your student needs to work on.

Repeated testing. Give your learner test after test after test. They must get used to completing the exam. Time your student or ask them to time themselves doing activities.

Research the exam. Know exactly what the exam is, who recognises it, how it can be used etc. The likelihood is that your student knows this themselves already but many students may ask you to advise them in the future.

Know the date. Ask your learner to give you the date of their test or to let you know when they know, this way you can plan your lessons accordingly to meet their needs.

Learn on the job. The best way of learning about an exam is by guiding a student through one. Don't be afraid to say 'yes' to a potential student who wants to do exam preparation. Just do your homework, and set out to do the best you can as the teacher.

Most importantly, although this is preparation for an exam, there is no need to let the fun disappear from the lesson! Enjoy.

How to become an even better teacher

The big downside of developing a career as an online English teacher is isolation from other teachers. In a school or, for that matter, any job where you work alongside co-workers, you get to share ideas, experiences, problems and successes. As a freelance English teacher working from home, it is easy to become isolated. Fortunately, the Internet can also solve this problem, offering as it does ways to network with other online English teachers. One thing you should aim to do is to develop a personal learning network, fellow teachers with whom you can share your ideas. Not only do you find out new things, but you get a greater sense of challenge when you hear the experiences of others.

After teaching for some time, you may wish to develop as a teacher of English as a foreign language. You may also begin to start thinking of making this a career and even teaching in a real classroom with several students at a time. If this is the case, considering further training is the best option for you. Below are some of the main qualifications you may want to consider.

CELTA

www.cambridgeenglish.org/teaching-english/teaching-qualifications/celta/

The CELTA is a qualification created by Cambridge English Language Assessment. This is an entry level qualification and you are not expected to have any teaching experience before doing it, though any experience will help you throughout this very challenging course. This course generally will take you about four weeks to complete and can be taken in many different countries around the world. The course is an excellent introduction to teaching and the qualification is widely recognised in the English teaching community. The CELTA is very 'hands on' and you will usually find yourself teaching a real group of students within the first days of the course.

Trinity CERT TESOL

www.trinitycollege.com/tesol

The Trinity CERT TESOL is a qualification devised by Trinity College London. The Trinity qualification is almost exactly the same as the CELTA and in my experience, the only reason a

teacher might choose one over the other would be location or maybe cost. This qualification also will take about four weeks and is accepted in most teaching centres around the world.

TEFL Graduate

<https://teflgraduate.com/tefl-courses/>

If you want to study for TEFL certification entirely online, you may be interested in courses offered by TEFL Graduate. They offer a range of online TEFL certification courses from a 40 hour basic course to a 150 hour Master course. The courses include quizzes, assignments and a final exam. Personal tutor support is provided for the Intermediate, Professional and Master courses.

Useful Websites

British Council

British Council has a superb teacher development site packed full of tips and advice on improving your teaching, along with resources to use in your lessons.

www.teachingenglish.org.uk

Cambridge English Teacher

This site is packed with tips and advice for teaching English, and includes courses, webinars and a knowledge base.

www.cambridgeenglishteacher.org

Part 3

Materials and Resources

In this section we're going to give you information on some of the best materials and resources for the Online English Teacher available on the Internet. The Internet is a vast gold mine of materials, much of it free, and it's easy to get lost in this vast collection of videos, films, worksheets, games, reading materials, audio recordings, songs, podcasts, apps and everything else. So what follows is just the tip of the iceberg, some of the best. Having said that, it wasn't all that long ago that the only materials available to teachers were expensive coursebooks and resource books published by a handful of publishing companies. These books were (and still are) quite expensive, and while they are still quite useful as a resource for teaching English online, there is a lot of high quality material available at the click of a mouse which doesn't require you to dip into your pocket. But when thinking about resources, always remember that YOU are the best resource your student has access to. The ideas that follow are merely there to supplement you.

Listening (audio and video)

Probably the most important type of resource to use in your lesson are listening materials. If you read the chapter on how to teach listening, you'll remember that it's important to get your student used to listening to people other than just you speaking English. Now, we remember the days when using video and audio recordings with students meant poking around in the back of a dusty cupboard to find badly-labelled cassettes in sticky cases, shoving it into a player and hoping the tape wouldn't get mangled up...then having to spend the next five minutes rewinding and forwarding the tape to get to the right place. Today everything is digital. Millions of video clips are a mouse click away. And they can easily be shared with students online. Video sharing websites like YouTube and Vimeo are obvious places, and there are some gems there, but the sheer quantity of videos there makes it hard to find something just right. Fortunately, lots of listening materials, both in audio and video format, which have been created specifically for our learners, can be found on the Internet. Here are a few sites we like.

The British Council

One of the best places to find high quality listening material is through the British Council websites and podcasts. They offer a fantastic selection of audio and video materials, most of which contain lesson plans and tasks that you can do with your student: these tasks can usually

be done on the British Council website, or you can download the activities on a pdf and use them as a basis for your lesson. You can find a complete list of their listening materials for adults and older teens at:

learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/en/listen-and-watch

We particularly like the following:

Professionals Podcasts

This is a collection of short audio recordings, suitable for intermediate to advanced students, about issues connected with business and academic issues, from biotechnology, eBay and developing creativity. They are usually monologues.

learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/en/professionals-podcasts

Word on the Street

Word on the Street is a series of half hour programmes created by the British Council and the BBC and looks at how English works in everyday life. Each episode is filmed in a different place in the UK and features drama, interviews and reports.

learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/en/word-street

Big City Small World

This is an audio soap opera, containing short episodes in which the characters discuss everyday life over a cup of coffee. Each episode comes with a lesson plan and a transcript.

learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/en/big-city-small-world

The British Council also have videos for teenage students and children, including:

Study Break: Video Zone

This section of the British Council's Teens website contains lots of short videos on a range of topics of interest to teenage students, complete with transcripts and activities.

learnenglishteens.britishcouncil.org/study-break/video-zone

Grammar Videos

This section contains animated videos of conversations that focus on different grammatical structures, such as reported speech, articles and modals. Each video comes with activities and transcripts.

learnenglishteens.britishcouncil.org/grammar-vocabulary/grammar-videos

Learn English Kids: Listen and Watch

This section of the British Council website for children contains lots of short animated stories and songs, along with activities.

learnenglishkids.britishcouncil.org/en/listen-and-watch

The British Council resources are so good that you might not need to go anywhere else, but here are a few other great websites that we've used to source listening materials for our lessons.

Randall's ESL Cyber Listening Lab

This is a fantastic site created by an American teacher, Randall Davis. It contains a huge amount of fun, engaging conversations on a wide range of topics at different proficiency levels, along with some activities and quizzes designed to develop your student's listening skills.

www.esl-lab.com

Voice of America Special English

The Voice of America website includes lots of listening materials, suitable for learners at different proficiency levels, based on current affairs issues.

learningenglish.voanews.com

BBC World Service

The BBC World Service website includes the latest news, usually in a much clearer accent than you might get in news broadcast to British viewers. They also have a Learning English section with short audio and video reports.

www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/language/newsextra

English Listening Lesson Library

ELLLO offers over 2000 free listening recordings with activities such as quizzes, vocabulary lessons and captions. It was created by Todd Beuckens, an English teacher based in Japan.

www.ello.org

Real English

Real English is an online video library of people being interviewed in English speaking countries, organised by function and proficiency level. What's good about the videos is that they are spontaneous, usually filmed in the street, so the language is authentic. The site also includes activities linked to the videos, including exercises based around transcripts of the videos.

www.real-english.com

TED Talks

If you have never come across TED Talks, then you need to check it out! Briefly, it's a collection of excellent talks, usually no longer than 15 minutes, given by some of the greatest minds in the world on topics ranging from the everyday to the extraordinary and everything in between. Downloadable transcripts are available for many of these talks and subtitles can be shown to help your learner understand the talk.

www.ted.com

Better still, lesson plans and activities geared towards the needs of English language learners have been produced for many of these talks, and these can be downloaded at:

tedxesl.com

EduCanon

EduCanon is a website which enables you to create interactive activities based around videos found in YouTube, Vimeo, TeacherTube, Khan Academy and TED Talks. The activities - usually in the form of questions - can be embedded into the video. These interactive videos can also be embedded into your own blog or website.

www.educanon.com

Film English

Film English uses short films as the basis for English language lessons. The site includes embedded video, usually from Vimeo, along with step-by-step guides to lesson activities.

film-english.com

Reading

Breaking News English

This is a great resource for finding lessons and activities based around the news, specifically BBC News reports. New lessons are uploaded every two days, based on a current news story and they are written at different proficiency levels. Every lesson comes with an audio recording of the text and a super variety of text-based activities.

www.breakingnewsenglish.com

Textivate

Breaking News English builds a lot of its activities using a separate website, Textivate, which is well worth checking out. You can create a wide range of activities based on a text simply by copying and pasting text into a text box and clicking submit. The website will then automatically generate lots of activities for your student to use.

www.textivate.com

Wikipedia Simple English

Wikipedia is a great source of information, but often the articles are very long and complicated, far too difficult for most learners to understand with ease. Fortunately, many articles are available in simplified English versions. Let's say you've found an article about Halloween on Wikipedia. On the left hand side of the screen you'll see various tools; further down you should see a list of languages that this article has been translated into. You'll often find that amongst that list of languages is listed 'Simple English'. Click on 'Simple English' and your long, complicated article on Halloween has suddenly become much easier to understand. Now you have the basis for a lesson. There are over 100,000 articles on Wikipedia written in Simple English. Go to simple.wikipedia.org for more details.

Images

Images are the Online English Teacher's best friend. They're easy to find and use, are a quick and easy way to describe vocabulary and grammar, and a single photo can form the basis of an entire lesson.

A great example of this is the British Council's Image Bank which contains photographs that form the stimulus for an entire lesson. Each photo comes with an audio recording related to the photo and activities.

www.teachingenglish.org.uk/image-bank

You can, of course, find several billion images on Google Images and Flickr. And don't forget your own camera - and your student's. Why not ask them to take photos of their home or neighbourhood and describe them to you?

Worksheet-style resources

Worksheets are one of the main resources used by classroom teachers and these can be adapted for use online. You can either send a copy of the worksheet through Skype or, even

better, upload it to an online whiteboard so you can look at the same sheet together and write on it.

Handouts Online

This site contains lots of worksheet style materials which can also be used online.

www.handoutsonline.com

Busy Teacher

Busy Teacher has a great range of free worksheets you can download and use in your lessons. The site also includes a useful blog in which teachers share their knowledge and tips.

www.busyteacher.org

One Stop English

One Stop English is a subscription website run by MacMillan Publishing and contains lots of worksheet style materials, many of which previously been published by MacMillan in print format.

www.onestopenglish.com

Teachit ELT

Teachit ELT is a subscription website. It is a great source of material. Most of the site (which includes audio files) is only available to subscribers, which costs £25 a year, but it does offer some content for free as PDFs.

www.teachitelt.com

Test preparation materials

If you're preparing students to take English language exams, you'll find a wealth of test prep materials online.

British Council IELTS Preparation

This site contains lots of materials and advice for preparing your student to take the IELTS test.

takeielts.britishcouncil.org/prepare

Cambridge English Exams

The Cambridge English exams site contains lots of information about the different exams offered by Cambridge English.

Other resources

There are a couple of other great resources we like.

Off2Class

Off2Class is a wonderful resource offering lots of focused language lessons based around slide shows which you, the teacher, present to the student. The lessons include teacher notes. To access all the lessons, you need to request a username and password. You can also set up usernames and passwords for your students so that they can access the same resources of their devices. Otherwise you simply share your screen using Skype or Google Hangouts.

www.off2class.com

English360

English 360 is quite an innovative website. It enables teachers to create, deliver and share materials. It also gives you online access to a wide range of coursebook materials published for adults by Cambridge University Press, as well as lessons and materials created by other teachers. You can also earn money from resources you create yourself. It's initially free for freelance teachers; you just pay if you add a student to one of your courses. To find resources created by other people, log in and go to the Resources Organiser (located under the Organise tab). From there you can search through a big library of materials.

www.english360.com

Simon's Cat

Simon's Cat is an animated cartoon created by British animator, Simon Tofield, featuring a perpetually hungry, charming and curious cat yearning for attention. The short animations (usually under 2 minutes) are simple yet always action packed and can be used as the basis for great lessons. You could, for example, ask your student to describe the events of the video, or ask a series of questions about what happens.

www.youtube.com/user/simonscat

Coursebooks

Many online English teachers use one or more of the many coursebooks published commercially by such publishers as MacMillan, Heinle-Cengage, Cambridge and Oxford. These are often packaged as a student book, a workbook, a teacher's book and a CD or two containing listening

materials from the student book and workbook. Ideally, both the student and teacher should have their own copies of the student book and workbook, so the activities in the book can form the basis of lessons. This means that the coursebooks either need to be available in bookshops in both your home town and your student's home town, or you'll have to have them sent out to you in the mail.

The advantage to the teacher of using a coursebook is that you don't need to spend time hunting down resources on the Internet, and because lessons are written out for you in the teacher's book, it's great for inexperienced teachers. However, in order to give your student the best value for their money, materials from coursebooks need to be supplemented or adapted for your student's particular needs. As you get more experienced, you can view coursebooks simply as a place from which you pick and choose activities to use, rather than plodding through the whole book, page-by-page.

There are lots of good coursebooks available (along with lots of mediocre ones). Here are a few that we have found useful for using in online lessons.

Cutting Edge

Edge is a very popular adult coursebook published by Pearson. The book takes a task-based approach to learning English and we like it especially due to the emphasis on speaking activities and the use of real-life, role-play type activities. The book is easy to use and has an accompanying teacher's guide. The book comes in six levels: Starter, Elementary, Pre-Intermediate, Intermediate, Upper-Intermediate and Advanced. For more information go to: www.pearsonelt.com/cuttingedge

Face2Face

Face 2 Face, like Cutting Edge, takes on a communicative approach to language learning. The book is published by Cambridge and is available in most countries. This book is fun and easy to use. The tasks and communication activities are easy to set up. This book also comes in all levels and has an accompanying teacher's guide. For more information go to:

www.cambridge.org/us/cambridgeenglish/catalog/adult-courses/face2face

Speak Out

Speak Out is a great coursebook for your learners. The book is a little more aimed at younger adults and is a great example of a communicative approach to learning a language. Speak Out is another book published by Pearson. It comes in the same levels as seen above and has an accompanying teacher's guide. For more information go to:

product.pearsonelt.com/speakout

Gateway

Gateway is a three level coursebook (B1, B1+ and B2 on the CEFR levels) for teenagers published by MacMillan. It includes some interesting topics for teens and each unit starts off with some vocabulary building activities. The reading and listening materials are quite good. However the coursebook does tend to plunge into pages of grammar activities that seem to serve no purpose, so pick and choose which of these you want to use with your student. I particularly like their 'Developing Speaking' sections in each unit. For more information, go to:

www.macmillanenglish.com/courses/gateway

Incredible English

Incredible English is quite a nice course for children, with lots of vocabulary and stories, with plenty of listening and speaking activities, and not too much grammar. It's a bit light on reading activities though, so you'd need to add these in yourself. For more information, go to:

elt.oup.com/student/incredibleenglish

IELTS Express

If you're preparing students for the IELTS exam, IELTS Express (published by Heinle-Cengage) is a good book. It comes in two levels, Intermediate and Upper Intermediate, and includes lots of exam tips and exam practice activities, so even if you don't know much about the format of the IELTS exam, you will after having taught from the book. For more information, go to:

www.cengage.com.mx/els/ielts-express