Do you sometimes shy away from using computers with your learners? Are you not sure what to do with them? This lesson gives an introductory overview of materials and activities that are central to using computers with English language students.

Task 1 – Melissa and the computer suite.

Melissa: I took my students into the computer suite the other day for the first time. I suggested that they do some writing, but all they ended up doing was logging on to their e-mail and sending messages to friends. And they weren't in English. I think it's probably better just to keep them in the classroom.

Do you agree with Melissa?
Jot down your answers on a note pad, then check the answer key below.

Task 1 Feedback

The situation that Melissa describes is typical. During class time, students will often use computers for personal activities rather than learning activities. However, part of the problem is perhaps that Melissa didn't provide her students with a specific aim or learning outcome, which means they weren't motivated to do any kind of learning activity. If students want to use e-mail, she could perhaps suggest that students e-mail each other in English. However, she would need to set this up carefully in the classroom before going to the

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Key skill

There is no doubt that computers are a useful learning tool in the English language classroom. However, as with any learning tool, teachers need to think carefully about how to use computers effectively so that students get benefit from them. Classroom activities using computers need to have a specific focus.

Task 2 – What does it take?

Below is a list of resources that it is useful to have available to students for the purposes of computer assisted language learning. Sort them into two groups: IT resources and learning resources.

List of resources

1. computer work stations
2. headphones
3. CD-Rom dictionaries
4. microphones
5. language learning software
6. a word processing programme
7. an e-mail programme
8. a printer
9. fast access band width
10. a projector
11. DVDs
12. internet web sites

IT resources	Learning resources

Check your ideas in the answer key.

Key skill

Different institutions will have different resources. Many schools have a computer suite, while others might have one or two stand alone computers in each classroom. Providing internet access is a good idea, but, if you only want the computers used for learning activities, it might pay to block some sites, for example, sites that allow students to access personal e-mail.

Task 3 – Evaluating computer learning materials

Numbers 1 to 8 below are a series of questions that teachers need to ask themselves when they are thinking about preparing lesson using computer-based materials (e.g. language learning software, web-based tasks). Letters a to h are example answers to the questions.

Questions
1. Is the material-learner interface appealing?
2. Can I do a whole class demonstration of the material?
3. Will students find this material motivating?
4. Is the language level of this material appropriate for my students?
5. Are my learning objectives clear in using this material?
6. Is this material good for individual study?
7. Does the material include some kind of guided discovery activity?
8. Do students get feedback on their work?

Example answers

a. Yes, this material will help students revise the simple past.

b. Yes, the design of the material makes it feel like a game where they score points.

c. Yes, there are language problems for students to think about and solve.

d. Yes, the programme is colourful, clear and easy to navigate.

e. Yes, there are probably only three or four words they won't know in the material.

f. Yes, I can use the projector to show everyone the screen and show them how to use the material.

g. Yes, they can click on the 'answers' icon which tells them what is correct and makes a useful suggestion if they get an answer wrong.

h. Yes, there's even a practical on-line help facility if students have a problem navigating the material.

Key skill

There are many different answers to these questions. The core issue here is that teachers need to ensure that students engage with materials with the same degree of motivation that we hope they engage with paper-based learning materials. Clearly, if a teacher is using computer for word processing or for some kind of internet research many of the questions in task 3 won't apply.

Task 4 – Some teaching ideas for the Internet

Letters a to d describe 4 teaching ideas that use the internet. Numbers 1 to 12 are specific tasks that go together with these teaching ideas. Match the tasks to the ideas.

Teaching ideas
a. Students are directed to the web site of a newspaper (for example, The Guardian)
b. Students work on a project of planning a holiday in an English speaking country. They are given a budget and have to find out how they can get around, where they will stay and what they will do.
c. Students are directed to the students' pages of an English language teaching publisher's web site.
d. Students create their own web page to put on a school intranet.

Tasks

1. Students scan and skim read different sites looking for the information they need.
2. Students do an on-line exercise that focuses on some up-to-date idioms.
3. Students get fluency speaking practice discussing the results of their research.
4. Students get gist and detailed reading practice of a variety of texts.
5. Students write short articles and news items.
6. Students can download language practice worksheets in PDF format.
7. Students can listen to podcasts on recent events.
8. Students get speaking practice discussing the content of the page.
9. Students get writing practice by adding a comment to a blog.
10. Students get writing practice by writing e-mail messages to request detailed information on things such as prices.
11. Students get speaking practice recording audio files to be uploaded.
12. Students can find language puzzles and quizzes that they can download.

Teaching ideas	Tasks
a. newspaper	
b. holiday project	
c. publisher web site	
d. creating a class web page	

Check your ideas in the answer key. 🔑

➲ Thinking about your teaching …

Conduct a survey and review of English language teaching web sites. Try to focus on materials that are available for students or to use with students, rather than those with teaching tips. Decide how motivating these materials are and how effective they would be in terms of student learning. Does the material make students think or do they mindlessly click on icons?

Note your findings in your *Teaching log*.

➲ Taking it to the classroom …

When you go into a computer suite, students often need to interact in different ways (alone, pairs, small groups). Just as you would with a normal lesson, make sure you plan these different interactions and think carefully about the physical space you have to work in. See the *Related Taskbook lessons* below

➲ Want to find out more … ?

On pages 187 - 199 of *Learning Teaching (2nd edition)* by Jim Scrivener (Macmillan 2005), there is further reading on using computers and the Internet with English language learners.

On pages 354 - 357 of *The Practice of English Language Teaching (4th edition)* by Jeremy Harmer (Pearson 2007), there is further reading on using computers with English language learners.

➲ Related TaskBook lessons…

You may be interested in the following lessons in the ESOL Teaching Skills TaskBook series, relating to this topic:

- **Unit 1 b) Student Interaction patterns and teacher roles:** Describes different ways of arranging students in your learning space and what roles a teacher plays within different arrangements.
- **Unit 5 a) Using authentic materials:** Looks at the pros and cons of using authentic materials and outlines a procedure of how to exploit them in the classroom.

Answer Key 🔑

Task 2 feedback

IT resources	Learning resources
1. computer work stations	**3.** CD-Rom dictionaries
2. headphones	**5.** language learning software
4. microphones	**6.** a word processing programme
8. a printer	**7.** an e-mail programme
9. fast access band width	**11.** DVDs
10. a projector	**12.** internet web sites

Task 3 feedback

1. d   2. f   3. b   4. e   5. a   6. h   7. c   8. g

Task 4 feedback

Teaching ideas	Tasks
a. newspaper	**4.** Students get gist and detailed reading practice of a variety of texts.
	7. Students can listen to podcasts on recent events.
	9. Students get writing practice by adding a comment to a blog.
b. holiday project	**1.** Students scan and skim read different sites looking for the information they need.
	3. Students get fluency speaking practice discussing the results of their research.
	10. Students get writing practice by writing e-mail messages to request detailed information on things such as prices.
c. publisher website	**2.** Students do an on-line exercise that focuses on some up-to-date idioms.
	6. Students can download language practice worksheets in PDF format.
	12. Students can find language puzzles and quizzes that they can download.
d. creating a class web page	**5.** Students write short articles and news items.
	8. Students get speaking practice discussing the content of the page.
	11. Students get speaking practice recording audio files to be uploaded.