

Activities for Using Junk Email in the ESL/EFL Classroom

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Subject: Opportunity of Global Proportions!

FINALLY!!!! The answer to supplementary MATERIALS and lesson PLANNING problems!

Stop being one of the 97% who can't think what to TEACH in their next lesson! READ THIS before you throw it away.

THIS IS NOT A SCAM. I will deliver you a series of exercises based on GENUINE Junk Mail that I have received over the past few weeks! Believe me, these lesson plans work like GANG-BUSTERS!!! And no longer will you have to RACK your brains before going into the classroom.

Send your checks, precious stones, etc, to...

And so it goes. Most of us regularly get messages which are perhaps not quite like the above, but which nonetheless are all too familiar to those who use the Net. Most of us don't even bother to read them, but delete the offending messages as soon as look at them.

But perhaps, if we are TEFLers, we shouldn't act so hastily. I propose to demonstrate that quite a lot of mileage can be made out of junk mail, and that it's always worth filing away a few of those unsolicited messages back from time to time.

Almost as soon as I signed up to my ISP, I began getting junk mail, so I created a folder entitled "Scams", into which, from time to time, I would divert the occasional missive. Soon I had twenty or more.

The time then came to make some sense of them, and I hope the following exercises illustrate the kind of material anyone can create, given adequate time. I have created six different types of exercise. Here they are:

1. **Matching Types:** there's a list of categories (Sex, Get Rich Quick, Your Fears, etc) and the student has to match each type with the extract to which it corresponds. (See [types.txt](#))
2. **Typical Language:** read through three junk e-mails, and determine what sort of phrases and expressions are typical of junk e-mail. (See [typical.txt](#))
3. **Comprehension Exercise:** I took a chain-letter proposal and added a few questions at the end: what's potentially wrong with the offer; summarise what the punter has to do in under fifty words; how does the perpetrator of the scheme make money. (See [comp.txt](#))
4. **Paraphrases:** read a sample junk mail message, then match the extracted sentences to their paraphrases. A bit obvious as an exercise, but I think it gives the students a flavour of the language of scams. (See PARAPHRA.TXT) (See [paraphra.txt](#))
5. **Cloze:** Short cloze exercise based on an advertisement received in a junk mail message. (See [cloze.txt](#))
6. **Howlers:** spot the mistakes made by junk-mail writers. I have composed this from a British English standpoint, but most of the mistakes would, I think, be unacceptable on either side of the pond. (See [howlers.txt](#))

And finally, once the students have familiarised themselves with the language...

7. **Write Your Own!** In this exercise, use the list of expressions provided to help you compose your own junk mail messages. Change and adapt the phrases to suit your own imagination. (See [write.txt](#))

Exercises 2, 3, 4, 6 and 7 would be best used by students at Intermediate level (say Cambridge First Certificate in English) as a minimum; number 1 and 5 might be tackled by pre-intermediate students. The beauty of computer-based texts is, of course, that they can be worked on to suit students at most levels.

In addition, short texts of up to 2,000 characters can easily be imported into a CALL program such as WIDA's StoryBoard or GapMaster.

A final suggestion. When saving junk mail texts, get as wide a range as you can. By far the majority seem to fall into the Get Rich Quick category and their vocabulary is rather limited. Those offering sex can sometimes contain entertaining slang and colloquialisms, but explaining "burned-out strippers", "Internet smut" or "some skank laying on a sheet" may best be kept for relatively advanced classes, all other things, such as local cultural considerations, being equal.

A warning needs to be made about copyright: I have changed the names of products and services, and deleted names and addresses, as I am told that the publication thereof could break the law. So any resemblance between product or service names appearing in this article and any person, product or organisation, whether in existence or defunct, is purely coincidental.

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