

# Teacher-made Activities for a Computer-based ESL/EFL Class

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Computer-based classes are likely to increase in terms of their number as well as impact in English language learning. More and more teachers are trying to use commercially available software as well as Internet resources. However, many teachers who are more experienced in computer-based classrooms are rather disillusioned due to the following facts.

1. Commercially available software most of the times centres on self-paced learning. Though this might be useful for self-study, teachers can hardly use them in their classes.
2. It is very difficult to find software that smoothly integrates into your curriculum.
3. Such software, more often than not, focuses on discrete items rather than activities that demand integration of skills or interaction.
4. There are difficulties in administration of a software-based classroom. These are related to licensing, distributing, and monitoring software.

Against this background, it seems useful to think about teacher-made activities for the computer-based class. Such activities can generate more interaction, and can easily integrate with the curriculum. I have provided three examples of such activities. The activities use simple and commonly used software such as Microsoft Power Point and Microsoft Word. Also, they are sufficiently open for teachers to modify them according to their objectives. If you are an expert user, you can directly go to the Examples section to view the activities. If you need some more background help, please read the following explanation of useful terms.

## Some Useful Terms

- **Classnet:** A network in which all computers in the classroom are connected to each other. The teacher's computer has the capability to monitor and manage the use of all computers. Typically the network is connected to a projector. Thus, it is possible to project images not just from the teacher's computer, but from any computer in the classroom.
- **Intranet:** A network in which typically all computers in the institution and/or campus are connected to each other. It is thus possible to share files among all users. This creates immense possibilities for collaborative language learning.
- **Track Changes** feature in Microsoft Word: This feature is useful for editing somebody else's work. It very neatly shows the writer the kind of changes the editor has suggested. To use the feature, open the file for editing, then click on Tools and select Track Changes. Check the relevant boxes in the dialogue box that come up.

## Examples of Teacher-Made Activities

### Activity No. 1 - Describing Pictures

- Equipment:
  - Intranet, Classnet and Power Point
- Objective(s)
  - Teaching adjectives
  - (But can also be applied to other vocabulary exercises)
- Preparation
  - Choose and scan at least ten suitable pictures. Insert them in a Power Point presentation.
- Classroom procedure
  - Make the presentation available on Intranet/ Classnet as a shared file.

- o Ask the student to open the shared Power Point file.
  - o They should use the *View > Notes Page* command
  - o They should write some adjectives describing their picture.
  - o Ask each group to project their pictures along with the notes pages. Discuss the use of adjectives.
- Tip:
  - o Gets more interesting if you use comic strips.
- Adaptation:
  - o Adapt the activity to teach vocabulary. If you choose pictures that describe an action or process, the activity can also be used to practise the skill of narrating events or describing a process.

## Activity No. 2 - Editing

- Equipment:
  - o MS Word and e-mail
- Objective(s)
  - o Paragraph writing
- Preparation
  - o Prepare five topics for paragraph writing.
- Classroom procedure
  - o Students work in groups of five. Each student writes a paragraph on the given topic using MS Word. The paragraph is then e-mailed to the next student in the group.
  - o Each student gets to edit 4 paragraphs. The student edits it using Track Changes feature in MS Word.
  - o Each student chooses a different colour to make editing changes.
  - o When the editing is done, each student looks at his/her edited piece. They discuss the changes with the editors, and accept or reject changes.
  - o Each student then reports what rules they learnt in this process.
- Tip:
  - o You can provide a specific focus to this activity. For instance, ask the students to use sentence connectors and discourse organisers in their paragraphs. The editors edit the paragraph keeping their focus on these items.

## Activity No. 3 - Simulated Discussion

- Equipment:
  - o Intranet, Power Point
- Objective(s)
  - o Enhance classroom interaction
  - o (Can also be used as a Pre-writing activity)
- Preparation
  - o Prepare a large collection of clip art pictures that the students can use.
  - o Prepare a starter slide that can begin discussion on a topic or a story.
- Classroom procedure
  - o The teacher projects the first slide on the screen.
  - o Students try to develop the next slide, using Clip Art, and adding dialogues in the call-outs.
  - o The first student who finishes gets a chance to project the slide.
  - o The students then continue to work on the sequel to this slide.
  - o And the discussion continues to be developed.
- Tip:
  - o The challenge is to keep the activity interesting. The teacher can also participate in the discussion to keep the discussion on-track and to sustain the interest of students.