

# WEB-BASED BUSINESS ENGLISH

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A growing body of research is gradually emerging that provides useful suggestions on how to exploit instructional online tools effectively or how to integrate the Internet for different language learning goals. As a courseware package and learning system, *Moodle* has great potential for supporting conventional classroom instructions to become the delivery system for blended (or hybrid) course formats, or even to be used as a standalone e-learning platform. In this presentation, I will provide an overview of *Moodle* features and point out those that are in particular useful for language learning. In addition, I will present some sample learning tasks and describe their implementation within a *Moodle* environment. *Moodle* is a template-based system to which content must be added. Many modules can be implemented in Moodle, including Lessons, Quizzes, and Resources. The lessons are developed and posted online in order to navigate the students. Quizzes test students on content. The quiz module includes different response types: fill-ins, multiple-choice, multi-choice (more than one answer can be selected), true false, matching, short-answer (exact matching). Resources give the class access to Web sites, articles, and readings for reference. *Moodle* allows for the integration of a wide range of resources. These include any kind of text-based or html-formatted documents, multimedia resources such as graphics, video or audio, or PowerPoint, *Half-Baked* exercises or Flash-based applications. A common component is the discussion forum, which allows the students to interact with their instructor and the other students on specified topics.

*Moodle* aims to (a) expand the learning space for students; (b) strengthen students' self-learning abilities; and (c) create an effective and interesting teaching and learning source. It undoubtedly creates infinite space that can extend the restricted academic learning time by providing electronic or online learning materials to promote self-learning and interactive learning. Both teachers and students can enjoy not only the flexibility of scheduling self-working plans, but also the usability of various teaching or learning resources. Furthermore, it provides an individual learning environment for students who either require more input or cannot master the objectives in regular classes, and creates a collaborative teaching environment for teachers to share not only their teaching resources but also their teaching experiences.

In preparing a web-based supplementary course which meets most of the expectations, the following criteria should provide a very operative and efficient learning environment: structured, pedagogically proven learning sequences, collaborative activities for enhancing all the four skills and learning outcomes, and high-quality tutoring backed up by frequent interaction. Once these criteria have been met, learners become engaged in developing their language competence.

Considering the variety of factors (curricular goals, pedagogical issues, learner needs, student proficiency levels), we have chosen the teacher-facilitated lesson design that lends itself well to integrate web-based resources into a foreign language learning curriculum. The approach of this type of lesson allows the instructor to determine a particular topic and a set of goals for the lesson. Through a particular task design, the students are facilitated and guided to explore a variety of resources, thus providing a clear goal to be accomplished by them. Furthermore, the tasks are not so broad that students wander aimlessly through the material yet open enough to provide multiple paths, outcomes, and interpretations, which can form the basis for subsequent classroom interaction. In the context of university web-based language training it has the potential to radically improve language education. This type of language teaching tool adds variety to the learning experience, allows and encourages autonomous learning, provides a database of visual and textual materials and supplies students with individually tailored tasks.

The primary aim of our web-based course is to design and implement web-based lessons that would incorporate into our traditional classroom language course. That is why we have chosen Moodle as a courseware package and learning system (a program that allows the classroom to extend onto the web), which has great potential for supporting conventional classroom instructions to do additional work outside of class, to become the delivery system for hybrid course formats. The design and development is guided by a particular philosophy, which highlights the involvement of students who actively construct knowledge as they interact with their environment.

A wide range of language skills can be enhanced with the application of web-based activities with Moodle. We put emphasis on vocabulary practice, reading and writing tasks, and listening activities, which are made interactive in a variety of ways. The most effective form of class discussion is realised through online forums, which are a good way to hold interesting debates and create reading and writing activities for our students. We mostly post a question or subject to start the discussion, and every response is displayed on the forum. Students can reply to the original question or to other responses, or they can create a new thread of discussion. They can also download and listen to a short audio piece and fill in missing words in a provided text. They then answer comprehensive questions about the text and may be asked to write a short essay. Answers are then e-mailed to the instructor for assessment. Students are also introduced to listening comprehension exercises and are asked to predict answers to questions about a subject by completing a multiple-choice activity. Moodle creates the right environment for professional language learning and introduces the types of learning activities and assessment tasks that have been designed to foster work-related language skills. It also delivers an efficient course in English for Business Studies. Depending on the didactical approach, it should be clear that in practice our web-based interactive learning is a mixed form of study, as in the pursuit of a good language teaching process, our teachers have decided to take advantage of the best of the two worlds, i.e. electronic and traditional classroom learning and teaching. In such a context electronic learning is used for extra homework and for gathering information, whereas classroom learning remains necessary to develop certain interpersonal skills. The web is used here to motivate students to prepare for a task, report back and then study the language that arises naturally out of the task cycle and its accompanying materials. It can be viewed as an opportunity par excellence because four conditions for language learning: exposure, use of language, motivation and instruction, are present more naturally than in a classroom environment. Our web-based course covers diverse topics such as Business Activity, Marketing, Accounting and Finance, People in Organisations, and Operations Management. These topics carry authenticity which students are most likely to encounter in a professional or business environment. The key concept underlying the use of materials from the World Wide Web is that the lessons and activities are curriculum-driven. We examined the curriculum particular to this language course, selected the primary concepts and foci and then decided how best to enhance it with authentic materials from the web. We have incorporated Internet resources into our lessons so that they compliment our objectives and goals and facilitate their achievements. In sum, the materials obtained through the Internet have always been selected only with the express purpose of improving foreign language teaching and learning.

It has probably come to your attention that there are very few web-based Business English courses designed with the advanced level student in mind. It is a fact that many non-native speakers studying English are familiar with everyday common words and expressions, but generally they have little knowledge of the specific vocabulary of their own profession. Learners are often frustrated by the fact, even though they have been studying English for many years, the more they learn the less they know about English for specific purposes. Therefore, our web-based Business English course has been created to help those learners who have progressed to a relatively high level of language competence, however, the professional language becomes more and more difficult and sometimes almost impossible to be used by them. The Institute of Languages at the University of Economics in Bratislava, therefore, has been pursuing a strategic plan for promotion of quality in teaching and learning foreign languages, with the concern of aligning its offer with the requirements of the economic and social environment in order to qualify people for the labour market, with high standards of language quality and competence.

Throughout our web-based course we have put emphasis on the introduction of a wide range of formal and informal business-related vocabulary, which is essential for advanced level learner of English. The introductory materials are presented by way of practical exercises, which usually contain words and expressions, which learners will have studied at an earlier stage in the classroom. Later, the individual tasks become progressively more difficult as one advances through the exercises. This is done intentionally: it is simply a practical tool for helping learners to understand, speak and write the professional vocabulary which is used and understood by all English people involved in various business-related fields. The importance of revision is incessantly emphasised. In nearly all of the lessons, learners are requested to complete a revision test, which allows them to practice the words, and expressions, which have been previously taught so learners will automatically be doing some sort of revision all the time.

To provide learners with purposeful and valuable language practice we exploit newspaper materials in which professional language and culture are inextricably interlinked, and therefore reflect a specific business culture through the language they contain. On-line newspaper extracts reflect the latest

changes in the language, and, in so doing, help learners keep abreast of language changes. Learners are provided with a linguistically topical, up-to-date and valuable linguistic data. Furthermore, these on-line texts offer an enormous variety of subject-matter, report real-life events, and this naturally arouses curiosity about crucial issues and can be effectively used to develop learners' professional language competence in the required field.

The development of web-based language teaching and learning activities has become an exciting and growing field. Computer technology has tremendous promise for making foreign language classroom more effective and stimulating. Web sites are designed to provide students with self-help learning resources to complement traditional textbooks. Therefore, if we combine technology with good ideas and creativity we can create catalysts for increased student learning, motivation and ultimate achievement.

## **References:**

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