

# Projects Using the Internet In College English Classes

Victoria Muehleisen

Institute of Language Teaching, Waseda University (Tokyo, Japan)

[vicky \[at\] mn.waseda.ac.jp](mailto:vicky[at]mn.waseda.ac.jp)

<http://www.waseda.ac.jp/faculty/96050/index-e.html>

A presentation given at the CALL: Basics and Beyond conference at Chubu University, Nagoya, Japan, on May 31, 1997.

## Reasons for using the Internet in English classes

I had two main motivations for starting to use the Internet in my English classes. First, I wanted students to be exposed to a wider range of English than they usually encounter in their daily lives in Japan; in particular, I hoped to find native speaking e-mail penpals for them. Second, I wanted to encourage students to use English for pleasure outside of class, and thought if I taught them the basics of e-mail and "netsurfing," they would be likely to continue these activities during their free-time. When I actually tried using the Internet in the classroom, these expectations were fulfilled, and I also discovered many other good reasons for doing such projects.

- **Learning to use computers provides a strong intrinsic motivation for learning English.** For most of my students, using computers is still a relatively new (and thus exciting) experience, so students are eager to use computers in class. Currently, Japan is experiencing an Internet "boom," and students want to be part of it. Practical considerations also motivate some students; they expect that they will need to use computers and English in their careers or when they study abroad, so they appreciate learning the practical skill of writing and sending e-mail in English.
- **The Internet places English in an international context.** Students quickly discover for themselves that a majority of the information on the Internet is in English; they also discover that they can use English as a means of learning about and communicating with people around the world, and not just in English speaking countries. Of course, students of English want to make contact with native speakers, but many of my students also have a strong interest in communicating with people from other countries as well. They are happy to discover that even if they do not know Thai or Chinese, for example, they can use English to communicate with a keypal (e-mail penpal) from Thailand or Hong Kong and to find web sites with information about these places.
- **Internet projects are interactive.** Even when students are simply browsing, they are actively choosing what they will look at next. Searching for information involves work on the part of the students, as do sites which ask the user to fill out forms. Most web sites have e-mail addresses so that viewers can ask questions or send comments to a creator of a site, something which makes the web more easily

interactive than a book or magazine. Corresponding with a keypad is of course very interactive, and making a class web site is also potentially very interactive as students anticipate the needs of their audience and then respond to the e-mail they (hopefully) will receive from people who view their site.

- **Facilities for using the Internet are often readily available**, so from a practical point of view, projects using the Internet are often easier to carry out than other CALL projects. At my school, for example, there are many computer labs around campus which are already linked to the Internet and set up with software for e-mail and browsing the WWW, and many of these labs have hours when students can use the equipment during their free time. In contrast, there are only a few labs where teachers can install their own CALL software, and access to these labs is often limited for both teachers and students. Also, many of my students have access to Internet-connected computers at home or at one of the new Internet cafes that are popping up around Tokyo.

## Typical activities using the Internet

There are a wide range of possible activities using the Internet. In the rest of this article, I describe four main types of activities and give suggestions for teachers who wish to try them.

- [Surfing the Net](#)
- [Using E-mail](#)
- [Doing Research](#)
- [Making a Class Web Site](#)

## Surfing the Net

Because so much of the material on the Internet is in English, even non-directed activity such as "surfing" the World Wide Web can involve a great deal of reading in English, and it can be a pleasurable, yet effective, way of introducing students to the basic functions of the browser such as the **Forward** and **Back** buttons, the **Jump** function and bookmarks. You probably wouldn't want to spend every class period just letting students surf, but by giving them a good start, you'll be encouraging them to continue outside of class.

As readers of this Internet article are no doubt aware, at first surfing can often be more frustrating than fun: sometimes you click on an interesting link and wait a long time for a page to appear on your screen, only to find a list of new links; then when you click on one, you get *another* list of links. For students with limited English skills, it is even more frustrating--page after page of foreign language can be simply overwhelming. There are several things, however, that you can do to reduce the level of frustration and help your students' first experiences go smoothly.

**Set up a web page for your class**, an "electronic bulletin board" where you post schedules, announcements and copies of information you hand out in class. This gets students used to the idea of using the Internet for information--if they miss a class or lose a handout, they

can find out what the assignment is on their own. Your students will probably like it if you include personal information about yourself. For example, my home page includes a section called **About Me** where students can read the answers to my "frequently asked questions" such as "Why did you come to Japan?" and "Can you use chopsticks?"

**Put together a list of "starting links"** for students who are new to the Internet so they connect directly to interesting sites without having to search first. Make the links as direct as possible, so that students see relevant information right away without having to choose from a long list of options. For example, most newspaper sites have a page with the daily headlines which contains a few pictures and a short list of top news stories. Make links that reflect your students' interests; if you add new links often and ask students to suggest new links, they will keep coming back to your page. My **English Class Links** page at <http://www.waseda.ac.jp/faculty/96050/englinks.html> includes links to the kinds of sites listed below:

- **Purely fun sites** such as *The Cyrano Server* at <http://www.nando.net/toys/cyrano/version2/compose-cyrano.html>; you fill in words (a name, an adjective, a plural noun, etc.) and the computer writes a love letter which you can then e-mail to the person of your choice. (The level of English used at this site proved to be a little difficult for my elementary students, but my intermediate level students enjoyed it.) Another site popular with my students is the *Home Page of the National Basketball Association* at <http://www.nba.com/>.
- **Newspapers** such as *The Japan Times* at <http://www.japantimes.co.jp:80/>, *The Washington Post* at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/>, and *The Guardian* at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/>.
- **Electronic news sources** such as *The United Nations Daily News Page* at <http://www.un.org/News/dh/latest.htm>.
- **Links about study abroad**, such as *Study in the USA: A General Guide for International Students* at <http://www.studyusa.com/>.
- **Sites for English study**, such as *Dave's ESL Cafe* at <http://www.eslcafe.com/> and *Self-Study Quizzes for English Students* at <http://www.aitech.ac.jp/~iteslj/quizzes/>.

**Teach basic searching skills.** Demonstrate how to use some of the basic search engines (e.g. *Excite* at <http://www.excite.com/> and *Yahoo* at <http://www.yahoo.com/>) and help students learn to pick search terms effectively.

**Show students how to make bookmarks** and copy them to their own disks. Make a way for students to share their favorite sites with classmates, perhaps by posting them on the class web page.

**Try a WWW Treasure Hunt contest** in which students practice their search skills (and their English skills) as they race to answer questions. Write questions based on interesting pages you find while you are browsing, and ask your advanced students to write some questions too. Here are some of the questions I used in a Treasure Hunt last year:

- *How many hairstyles has Hillary Clinton had since her husband has been president? Can you find a page which shows you some of them? (The answer can be found at <<http://hillaryshair.com/index.shtml>>.)*
- *What is the official mascot of the Nagano Olympics? Can you find a picture of it? (The answer can be found at <<http://www.olympic.org/games/nagano>>.)*
- *Can you find an English page of someone who has the same first name or last name as you?*

**Download pages ahead of time** onto an on-campus computer. While I have not done this myself, I think it would be very useful at schools where there are problems with Internet access, if, for example, only a few computers are connected to the Internet, or if the connections are usually very busy or very slow. You can use your web browser's **Save As Source** command to do this, but if you are going to download a lot of pages with graphics, it would probably be useful to use a program designed for this purpose, such as the WebWhacker program available at <<http://www.ffg.com>>.

## **Using E-mail**

Reading and writing e-mail in English is more interactive (and thus more challenging) than netsurfing. There are many ways to use e-mail in the classroom, including those below:

**Make a class e-mail directory** and encourage students to practice by sending English e-mail to each other.

**Find keypals (e-mail penpals)** for your students, or help them find their own. In the ideal situation, each student is matched with two or three university students in other countries, but this can sometimes be difficult because of differences in school schedules. (In Japan, for example, the academic year begins in April and the spring term runs through July, and it can be difficult to find classes in Europe or North America which are meeting at the same time.)

In cases where you want to closely supervise the e-mail exchanges (if, for example, you are requiring e-mail as part of the homework for a class) it is probably better to match your class with another class so that you and the other teacher can easily monitor what the students are doing and make sure that each student is getting a response from a keypal. In other situations (for example, if you simply want to provide advanced students with optional English practice outside of class) it might be enough to direct the students to sites where they can find keypals on their own. There are many Internet sites which deal with keypals; the ones I have found most useful are listed below.

- *Intercultural Classroom Connections at <<http://www.stolaf.edu/network/iecc/index.html>> is the best site I've found for teachers who want to match up classes for keypal exchanges or other Internet projects.*
- *The EXCHANGE list of penpals at <<http://deil.lang.uiuc.edu/exchange/contributions/penpals/penpals.html>> is a very*

good site for individual students looking for keypals. All listings are current (old listings are removed after one month) and contain information about the keypals' hobbies and interests.

- The Pen Pal Exchange at <<http://www.iwaynet.net/~jwolve/pal.html>> has listings for individuals looking for penpals as well as for teachers who want to match up classes. Most of the class listings are for elementary through high school classes, however.
- Dave's ESL Cafe also has a list of individuals who are looking for penpals at <<http://www.pacificnet.net/~sperling/student.html>>.

**Use international e-mail exchange in class projects.** This could be as simple as assigning a homework assignment in which students ask their penpals about their opinions on a particular topic, or it could be much more complex.

- Ruth Vilmi at the **Helsinki Institute of Technology**, for example, has an on-going project in which students from different countries exchange their essays on particular topics. You can read about the project and see some of the students' writing at <<http://www.hut.fi/~rvilmi/index.html>>.
- Another interesting project was carried out by Jon Brokering's students at **Chuo University**; his students exchanged e-mail with people in Hong Kong as part of their research on the topic of the return on Hong Kong and then presented the results of their research on the Internet. The project can be seen at <<http://www.brokering.com/adv96/>>.

**Encourage students to send e-mail feedback** as they surf the net. Most pages have an address to which viewers can send questions and comments.

**Recommend discussion lists** for your students who enjoy e-mail and have plenty of time to read and write it. There are specialized discussion lists on every conceivable topic, although the language used in many of them may be too difficult for some students. For this reason, Lloyd Holliday of La Trobe University in Australia and Thomas Robb of Kyoto Sangyo University in Japan have started mailing lists for students of English on topics such as business, current events, movies, and science and technology. You can find out more about these lists and how to join them at

<<http://www.latrobe.edu.au/www/education/sl/sl.html>>. You'll want to warn your students, however, that discussion lists can sometimes lead to high volumes of e-mail.

## **Research**

Once students have a basic understanding of the Internet, they can begin to use it to actively learn about things they are interested in and to work on assignments for your class and other classes. In order to guide students effectively, you'll need to spend some time finding out what is available on the particular topics they are interested in. Below I've listed some of the kinds of resources available on the Internet. (My examples are related to

linguistics and language teaching, but of course, these types of resources are available in many other academic disciplines too.)

- **On-line newspapers, magazines and journals** such as the one you are reading right now.
- **Reference materials** such as dictionaries, bibliographies, databases, e.g., the ERIC database at <<http://ericir.sunsite.syr.edu>>.
- **Computer software** (often freeware or shareware), e.g., CONC concordance program available from the Summer Institute of Linguistics at <<http://www.sil.org:8080/>>.
- **Official press releases and reports** from governments and NGOs, e.g., the United Nations at <<http://www.un.org>>.
- **Discussion lists** devoted to a particular topic, e.g., the Linguist List ( part of the Linguist Network at <<http://www.emich.edu/~linguist/>>). These provide a way for students to ask questions and contact experts in the field.
- **"Mega-sites"** which contain links to all of these sources and more. The Linguist Network, for example, contains links to a variety of sites of interest to linguists, including book reviews, dictionaries, databases, job information, syllabi and more.

## ***Making a class web site***

This is a way for students to use English to share their ideas and/or the results of their research and class work with the world. There are a variety of different possibilities and formats. For example, you could publish pieces of student writing, have students take photographs and write captions, or even organize a question-and-answer site where people could send their e-mail questions about a topic your students know well. How you organize the project and what your pages ultimately look like will depend on a number of factors, including, for example, the number of students in your class, their level of English skills and computer skills, and the amount of class time which will be spent on the project. Below, I've listed some of the steps you'll probably need to take in carrying out a class web page project.

1. **Decide on the size of working groups and the division of labor.** Will students work individually, in small groups, or as a class? Will students learn to use html to do the layout of the pages themselves, or will you be doing the actual coding yourself?
2. **Decide on a theme,** either one related to class topics or one related to students' other interests. A class web site can be used to present Internet-based research or the results of more traditional class assignments.
3. **Decide on a target audience.** Will your pages be for other college students? For people with an interest in law or sociology? For people who are interested in Japanese culture?
4. **Look for related pages on the WWW** that you might want to link to.
5. **Have students browse the WWW focusing on page layout.** Have students think about the following questions: What makes a page interesting and easy to read?

What is a good ratio of pictures to text? How long does it take for the graphics to load?

6. **Have students look at sites made by other students** for ideas about themes and layout. In addition to the class pages made at Helsinki Institute of Technology and Chuo University, described above, some examples include:
  - o The Daily Life in Japan site made by my Intermediate English class at Waseda at <http://www.tky.threewebnet.or.jp/~jay/vicky/students/students.html>.
  - o The Famous Personages in Japan site made by students at Kyoto Sangyo University at <http://cc2000.kyoto-su.ac.jp/information/famous/index.html>.

Links to more student sites are listed in the resources below.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, I would urge English teachers to make use of the Internet in their English classes. Such projects are a good way of motivating students to use English outside the classroom and to make English a part of their daily lives. This article has presented a range of projects, and while it would probably not be desirable or even possible to do all of these projects with one class, I hope that you will use some of the ideas here with your classes.

## **Useful Resources**

In addition to the many useful articles and teaching suggestions in the [The Internet TESL Journal](#), the sources below also contain useful information for planning projects using the Internet.

### **Print Resources**

- Williams, Bard. 1995. *The Internet for Teachers*. Foster City, CA: IDG Books Worldwide.
- McGuire, Steve. 1997. [Resources for Teachers on the Net](#). *The Language Teacher* 21:3, 33-5.
- McGuire, Steve and Tim Newfields. 1997. *Language Teaching and the Internet: An Introduction to the World Wide Web*. *The Language Teacher* 21:1, 32-24.

### **Internet Resources**

- The Linguistics Funland TESL PAGE at <http://www.linguistics-funland.com/tesl.html> has links to sites containing exercises and activities for students, articles and essays about TESL, teaching materials and software, teaching jobs, and more. Linguistics Funland is the starting point of the [ESL Loop](#), which links various web sites related to ESL.

- *VOLTERRE-FR: Internet Projects for Learners and Teachers of English at <<http://www.wfi.fr/volterre/inetpro.html>> contains links to projects around the world.*
  - *The EXCHANGE site at <<http://deil.lang.uiuc.edu/exchange/>> provides a place for ESL students to publish their writing. There are also penpal listings, self-study materials, and links to class projects.*
  - *The Foreign Language Teaching Forum (FLTEACH) at [http://www.cortland.edu/www\\_root/flteach/flteach.html](http://www.cortland.edu/www_root/flteach/flteach.html) is "an integrated service for FL teachers." It contains the archives of the FLTEACH discussion list, as well as links to information of interest to language teachers.*
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- **Facilities for using the Internet are often readily available,** so from a practical point of view, projects using the Internet are often easier to carry out than other CALL projects. At my school, for example, there are many computer labs around campus which are already linked to the Internet and set up with software for e-mail and browsing the WWW, and many of these labs have hours when students can use the equipment during their free time. In contrast, there are only a few labs where teachers can install their own CALL software, and access to these labs is often limited for both teachers and students. Also, many of my students have access to Internet-connected computers at home or at one of the new Internet cafes that are popping up around Tokyo.

## Typical activities using the Internet

There are a wide range of possible activities using the Internet. In the rest of this article, I describe four main types of activities and give suggestions for teachers who wish to try them.

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- **Newspapers** such as *The Japan Times* at <http://www.japantimes.co.jp:80/>, *The Washington Post* at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/>, and *The Guardian* at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/>.
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- **Links about study abroad**, such as *Study in the USA: A General Guide for International Students* at <http://www.studyusa.com/>.
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**Teach basic searching skills.** Demonstrate how to use some of the basic search engines (e.g. Excite at <<http://www.excite.com/>> and Yahoo at <<http://www.yahoo.com/>>) and help students learn to pick search terms effectively.

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- **Reference materials** such as dictionaries, bibliographies, databases, e.g., the ERIC database at <<http://ericir.sunsite.syr.edu>>.
- **Computer software** (often freeware or shareware), e.g., CONC concordance program available from the Summer Institute of Linguistics at <<http://www.sil.org:8080/>>.
- **Official press releases and reports** from governments and NGOs, e.g., the United Nations at <<http://www.un.org>>.
- **Discussion lists** devoted to a particular topic, e.g., the Linguist List ( part of the Linguist Network at <<http://www.emich.edu/~linguist/>>). These provide a way for students to ask questions and contact experts in the field.
- **"Mega-sites"** which contain links to all of these sources and more. The Linguist Network, for example, contains links to a variety of sites of interest to linguists, including book reviews, dictionaries, databases, job information, syllabi and more.

## **Making a class web site**

This is a way for students to use English to share their ideas and/or the results of their research and class work with the world. There are a variety of different possibilities and formats. For example, you could publish pieces of student writing, have students take photographs and write captions, or even organize a question-and-answer site where people could send their e-mail questions about a topic your students know well. How you organize the project and what your pages ultimately look like will depend on a number of factors, including, for example, the number of students in your class, their level of English skills and computer skills, and the amount of class time which will be spent on the project. Below, I've listed some of the steps you'll probably need to take in carrying out a class web page project.

1. **Decide on the size of working groups and the division of labor.** Will students work individually, in small groups, or as a class? Will students learn to use html to do the layout of the pages themselves, or will you be doing the actual coding yourself?
2. **Decide on a theme,** either one related to class topics or one related to students' other interests. A class web site can be used to present Internet-based research or the results of more traditional class assignments.
3. **Decide on a target audience.** Will your pages be for other college students? For people with an interest in law or sociology? For people who are interested in Japanese culture?
4. **Look for related pages on the WWW** that you might want to link to.
5. **Have students browse the WWW focusing on page layout.** Have students think about the following questions: What makes a page interesting and easy to read? What is a good ratio of pictures to text? How long does it take for the graphics to load?
6. **Have students look at sites made by other students** for ideas about themes and layout. In addition to the class pages made at Helsinki Institute of Technology and Chuo University, described above, some examples include:
  - The Daily Life in Japan site made by my Intermediate English class at Waseda at <<http://www.tky.threewebnet.or.jp/~jay/vicky/students/students.html>>.
  - The Famous Personages in Japan site made by students at Kyoto Sangyo University at <<http://cc2000.kyoto-su.ac.jp/information/famous/index.html>>.

Links to more student sites are listed in the resources below.

## Conclusion

*In conclusion, I would urge English teachers to make use of the Internet in their English classes. Such projects are a good way of motivating students to use English outside the classroom and to make English a part of their daily lives. This article has presented a range of projects, and while it would probably not be desirable or even possible to do all of these projects with one class, I hope that you will use some of the ideas here with your classes.*

## Useful Resources

*In addition to the many useful articles and teaching suggestions in the [The Internet TESL Journal](#), the sources below also contain useful information for planning projects using the Internet.*

### Print Resources

- Williams, Bard. 1995. *The Internet for Teachers*. Foster City, CA: IDG Books Worldwide.

- McGuire, Steve. 1997. [Resources for Teachers on the Net](#). *The Language Teacher* 21:3, 33-5.
- McGuire, Steve and Tim Newfields. 1997. *Language Teaching and the Internet: An Introduction to the World Wide Web*. *The Language Teacher* 21:1, 32-24.

### **Internet Resources**

- The Linguistics Funland TESL PAGE at <http://www.linguistics-funland.com/tesl.html> has links to sites containing exercises and activities for students, articles and essays about TESL, teaching materials and software, teaching jobs, and more. Linguistics Funland is the starting point of the [ESL Loop](#), which links various web sites related to ESL.
  - VOLTERRE-FR: Internet Projects for Learners and Teachers of English at <http://www.wfi.fr/volterre/inetpro.html> contains links to projects around the world.
  - The EXCHANGE site at <http://deil.lang.uiuc.edu/exchange/> provides a place for ESL students to publish their writing. There are also penpal listings, self-study materials, and links to class projects.
  - The Foreign Language Teaching Forum (FLTEACH) at [http://www.cortland.edu/www\\_root/flteach/flteach.html](http://www.cortland.edu/www_root/flteach/flteach.html) is "an integrated service for FL teachers." It contains the archives of the FLTEACH discussion list, as well as links to information of interest to language teachers.
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