Communicating on the Net

PAM McPHERSON
DENISE E MURRAY
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Teaching with New Technology is a series that provides teachers with practical, research-based approaches to using computer technologies in their language classrooms.

We have deliberately chosen to use the term ‘computer-based technologies’ to highlight the technologies where the computer is an obvious tool. Many other classroom tools and artefacts use digital technology, but they do not involve computers as machines in any obvious way. Such tools and artefacts include VCRs, mobile phones, clocks and language labs. These new computer-based technologies were initially taken up by teachers who had a passion for computer technology. Now that these technologies have been used in language education for almost two decades, many other teachers want to explore their use in their own classrooms. Language teachers are interested in using computer-based technologies both to facilitate language learning and to help their learners acquire the new literacies of the digital age (see, for example, Snyder 2002). In English language education in particular, teachers of immigrants and refugees realise they need to help their learners acquire computer skills since students are likely to take jobs that require familiarity with a range of digital literacies. In many countries where English is being learned as the global language for wider communication, students want to learn English to access the new technologies. While still only 10 per cent of the world’s population is online, digital literacies are increasingly becoming an essential tool for social, educational and occupational worlds.

The goal of this series is to provide teachers who are new to computer-based technologies with practical techniques and lessons they can use in their language classrooms. However, the philosophy behind the series is that, as language teaching professionals, teachers

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“It is not so much the computer but the kinds of tasks and activities that learners do on the computer that can make the difference …

(Hoven 1999: 149)
want more than hints and techniques; rather, professional teachers want to understand the research and theory on which teaching approaches are built. They are also interested in understanding which issues surrounding the use of computer-based technologies still need to be explored and in conducting research in their own classrooms. While this series focuses on the adult learner, many of the activities can be used in classrooms of children and young adults.

Although the various features of the new technologies often overlap in use inside and outside the classroom, teachers (and learners) need to be able to approach teaching and learning with these new technologies in incremental stages. Therefore, each book in the series focuses primarily on one aspect of using computer-based technologies in the language classroom.

Each book:

- summarises the principal findings about the use of computer-based technologies to support teaching and learning in language programs;
- offers practical suggestions for teaching using these technologies;
- provides detailed lesson plans for some suggestions; and
- raises issues that teachers can explore in their own classrooms.

Many of the suggestions for teachers to explore involve action research, a research methodology for practitioners to investigate their own work practices. In educational settings, action research provides teachers with a tool for:

- planning what and how they will investigate;
- teaching based on what they want to investigate;
- observing their practice; and
- reflecting on their observations.

This process is then reiterated, with teachers changing their practice based on their observations and reflections, and then beginning the cycle again (for example, Kemmis and McTaggart 1988; Burns 1995). An extensive bibliography is provided for teachers who want to explore any of the concepts and findings discussed in this series. The bibliography, which includes both referenced materials and materials for further reading, is organised by chapter at the end of each book.

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**COMMUNICATING ON THE NET**

**Introduction**

This volume provides teachers with practical, research-based suggestions for using computer technology for communicative activities in language teaching. The chapters are organised around a variety of different communicative tools on the Internet. This does not mean, however, that technology should be driving the curriculum. We have chosen this structure merely to facilitate the discussion and to help teachers find teaching activities and tasks easily. Several of the chapters discuss how to help learners use email, the most widely used of the computer-based communication tools. While some of the activities necessarily are technical in nature, the teaching suggestions and lesson plans are situated in language learning.

**Participating in a digital world**

For language learners to participate in an increasingly digital world, they will need to use the technology via English and to learn the different genres and text types used in this new medium of communication. Many of the learners in our studies were unfamiliar with computers and being online, and they needed scaffolded instruction on how to acquire computer literacy. We include the most common computer-mediated communication (CMC) forms used for language learning in our studies – email, chat and discussion lists. While MUDs and MOOs (see Glossary) are increasingly being used in language teaching, they can be conceptualised as a form of discussion list, one that requires the learners to take on roles and act as different actors in a virtual world rather than as themselves in a real world mediated via the virtual.

To communicate on the Internet does not necessarily require sophisticated knowledge of and ability to use the World Wide Web. The Internet is the worldwide network of computer networks that connects computer users who gain access through an ISP (Internet service provider), which may be provided through school or work or for which learners can sign up in the same way as for a telephone service.
The World Wide Web, on the other hand, is a hypertext-based system for accessing a variety of resources on the Internet.

**Communicating and accessing information on the Web**

Both to communicate and to access information on the Web, learners need to be online – that is, have a live connection to the Internet. To communicate asynchronously (via email, for example) or synchronously (via chat, for example), we need to be connected to the Internet; however, except for applying for an email account through a service provider such as Yahoo! (see Chapter Three), learners can communicate without knowing how to read and understand webpages or how to search the Web. In some institutions, they may even be using an email client such as Eudora and so need no knowledge of the Web at all.

Therefore, in the teaching suggestions and lesson plans, we have identified activities that do not require learners to be able to read webpages and search the Web, by listing them as ‘Not requiring students to have Web skills’. However, many teachers will want to have learners engage in activities that include both communication and also accessing information from the Web. We have identified these as ‘Requiring students to have Web skills’. Information on how to use the Web in language teaching is provided in another volume in this series, *Using the Web to support language learning*. We have also suggested activities that can be done in the classroom as preparation for online activities.

Teachers who use a variety of CMC tools to facilitate language learning have noted several issues around their use; so, to frame the discussion presented in the following chapters, we will first summarise some of these findings: the roles of teachers and learners, authentic language use, the need for teachers to be flexible, the value for learners because they learn both a new skill and new text types.

**Teacher and learner roles**

Many of the books about using computers in instruction claim that computers help learners become more autonomous or self-directed in computer-based instructional settings (for example, Warschauer, Turbee and Roberts 1994). The teacher’s role in such settings is as a facilitator of student-centred learning or even as a collaborator in meaning-making with students. This new role is often summarised as teachers becoming ‘the guide on the side’ rather than ‘the sage on the stage’. However, taking the role of guide does not absolve the teacher from the responsibility for designing instruction to enable learners to become self-directed (Healey 1999). Indeed, there is also much research evidence that teachers need to scaffold learning, pre-teach and provide follow-up feedback before learners can branch out on their own (for example, Healey 1999; Jones 1999; Vazquez 2002; Murray 2003). Corbel (in press) presents a somewhat different perspective, noting that teachers play intermediation roles between the learner and the technology. Such roles might be as an adviser of what materials to use or as a modifier of the content. Certainly, teachers adopt new roles and so do learners when teaching and learning with computer-based technologies.

**Opportunities for authentic language use**

CMC, because it provides for human-to-human communication, can give learners opportunities to engage with either other learners of English or with native speakers. If teachers have students communicate with a keypal via email, learners have an authentic audience, but they also have the time to compose their language, whereas in chat they need to speak on the fly, which can intimidate some learners. In casual uses of CMC, spelling and syntax error is more acceptable than in other written modes (for example, Murray 1991). This acceptance of error frees learners so they can focus on meaning rather than form. However, Warschauer (1999) found that one of the second language learners he studied was verbally berated for her less-than-perfect English. As teachers, then, we need to carefully choose the recipients of our students’ computer-mediated communications.

**Teacher flexibility**

In face-to-face classrooms, teachers need to be flexible if they are to take advantage of teachable moments and meet learners’ needs rather than keeping strictly to their lesson plans. When using CMC, teachers need to
be even more flexible – either because of a breakdown in the technology or, since it is authentic communication, because more opportunities for real communication occur. Vázquez (2002) reports that one of the teachers she observed changed his lesson plan for the day as a student who had just had a baby boy attended the lesson and everyone was excited about having him back. So the teacher had the students send an e-greeting card to their classmate to congratulate him for the birth of his first baby instead of having them write a recount to be sent as an attachment.

**Learning a life skill**

While many young people of the wired generation use computers with ease and may even be learning English in order to use the Internet (for example, Warschauer 2001), many adult immigrants and refugees and learners from less technologically advanced countries may be learning to use computers for the first time in their language classrooms. For such students, then, the goal of using CMC is not only to learn English, but also to learn how to use email on the job or for their own personal needs (Vázquez 2002). For learners far from their friends and families, email is a cheap and fast way for them to keep in touch.

*Many of the ones that set up an email account continued to email their teacher after finishing the course. Additionally, they learnt how to avoid junk mail, how to manage their accounts effectively, and so on.*

(Vázquez 2002: 33)

Although Bahaa El Din was referring to Egypt in this quote (see left), he summarises the needs for all learners in the 21st century – not only do we need the technical skills, but we also need the language and literacies that the new technologies require. Literacy has been defined in a variety of ways – from the physical skill of reading and writing to the ability to read and rewrite the world (for example, Gee 1996; Warschauer 2001). This latter definition adopts an ideological view of literacy (Street 1984) – that is, literacy is seen as sociocultural practice and, thus, not a single phenomenon or skill. Educators working within this approach to literacy focus on teaching that will empower learners by enabling them to read the ideology within texts and accept or reject the message (Hood and Joyce 1995); in other words, introducing students to the social power of different literacies. The language and literacies of the new technologies form a subset of the literacies that learners will need to be empowered in their personal and work and community lives. This book will help teachers and learners achieve that goal.
As well as learning the variety of genres and tools possible using CMC, learners also need to be aware of the conventions of CMC, both those that are explicit and those that are more implicit. Many discussion lists and listservs explicitly define appropriate online behaviour. These conventions have been called ‘netiquette’, a term combining the Internet and etiquette. Several books and articles have now appeared on netiquette (for example, Shea 1994; Kitao and Kitao 1997).

The need for such written conventions arose because of a phenomenon called ‘flaming’, uncontrolled emotional language used on CMC. A number of researchers (for example, Shea 1994) have identified flaming, even suggesting that, since it is a natural part of CMC, it should be accommodated rather than banned. Other researchers (for example, Ferrara et al 1991; Murray 1991; Davis and Brewer 1997; Joomjaroen 2000), however, have not found evidence of flaming in their data, indicating that such language is more the result of the particular context of use than of the medium itself. However, since CMC lacks some of the visual cues of face-to-face interaction and yet is often quite informal, users need to make explicit the tone of their messages.

The following list of conventions can be discussed with learners, but should not be considered static rules. CMC is an evolving medium of communication, and conventions are fluid and flexible.

**Management of emails**

- Copy emails to yourself, especially if you require a reply; this will help remind you of what you requested.
- Read and respond to emails as quickly as possible – both for one’s own sanity and to be polite to the sender.
- If away from your computer for some time, begin reading emails and postings from the most recent date backwards or by topic; often, many of the initial emails will be superseded by later ones. If you begin at the earlier date, you may reply to what is now a redundant message, creating still more email for the poor recipient.

**Subject of email or posting**

- Identify the subject of your email or posting; many email/discussion list readers do not read them in time-received order, but try to prioritise. They can only do that if the subject is transparent.
- Use reply for email only when actually replying to the subject of that email; otherwise, readers will be confused by an email with a subject on one topic, and the content of the email on another.
- Briefly summarise (or append) the original email when using reply; although email often looks like spoken language, context is missing, and so the writer needs to provide sufficient context for the reader.
- Use a common subject line for discussion or emails on the same topic so they can be ‘threaded’.
- Keep each email to one subject only; many email users file their emails by subject. Having more than one subject per email makes such filing very difficult.
- Keep contributions to discussion lists, chats and email fairly short; some people have to pay for time online; some listservs will not accept long messages.

Chats with our ESL groups certainly had more communication types in common with face-to-face conversations among students in similar courses than communication types that have been identified in instructional native speaker chats. No flaming or negative interaction took place, nor was there much playfulness or humour. (Joomjaroen 2000: 15)
• Keep to the topic of the discussion list or listserv.
• If you have a personal message for a member of a listserv or discussion list, send them an individual, separate email. Do not email the whole list to make appointments etc.

**Intepersonal relations**

• Be polite, especially avoiding comments or tone that could offend or confuse people from other cultures.
• Before sending an email in anger, wait a day, reread the email and try to frame it politely.
• If you receive an email that you consider is ‘flaming’, either discontinue interaction with that person or, if emotive emails continue, contact the listserv or discussion list moderator if you are using such a service.
• Use appropriate language to substitute for nonverbal cues such as tone of voice or facial expressions.
• Use emoticons (see Glossary) sparingly; while they are cute, many people find them annoying and childish.
• When referring to another person’s email, use the person’s name and quote from the email (see Chapter Seven), but edit the quote to avoid clutter. Provide just enough information so that the recipient can understand what you are referring to.
• Do not expect an immediate reply to your email or posting; not everyone is online all day.
• Think carefully about sending unsolicited emails to famous people, whether they be public figures, professors in your field or the president of your company; imagine what it would be like to receive several hundred or thousand emails a day.
• When someone asks you to do something and you do it, confirm that you have so that the person doesn’t keep wondering whether to contact you again.

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*In fact, on many discussion lists you will find that people apologise for long messages and there is an unwritten rule that messages should be kept short so as not to tax the time and patience of readers.*

(Daly 1996: 16)

• Don’t read your emails while talking with someone face-to-face.
• Use ‘cc’ only when you mean it as ‘for your information’; if you want a reply, list the person in the ‘to’ line.
• Don’t feel compelled to reply to a message in which you are only ‘cc-ed’; some people reply to everything, whether they have something to say or not, and this only clutters other people’s inboxes.
• Don’t forward emails without the permission of the sender. Even though it is very easy to forward emails, it is only courteous to ask a sender; otherwise, you may find yourself in the embarrassing situation where your email gets forwarded from person to person and eventually to the person you talked about in your email. Since you cannot be sure your recipient will follow this convention, do not send confidential information unless stating that it is confidential and to be destroyed on receipt. Use snail mail or the telephone if you want to be sure of complete confidentiality.

**Register**

• CMC, like all forms of communication, varies depending on the topic, interactants and context. Choose the appropriate register for the particular context. If writing a job application, use a formal business letter as the model text type.
• If your topic is long or complicated, consider using another medium (face-to-face or telephone) or compose your message offline using a wordprocessor and send it as an attachment. Not everyone can read easily online, and this allows such people to print out your message and read it in hard copy.
Teaching suggestions

Not requiring students to have Web skills

• Discuss with students some of the unwritten rules of spoken English (for example, turn-taking, phatic communication, adjacency pairs); have them compare these rules with those in their own language/culture; discuss the reasons for these differences.

• Teach politeness strategies, especially those for disagreeing or complaining; compare the strategies in spoken language with those in written media.

• Teach basic adjacency pairs in English (for example, offer/acceptance, apology/acceptance, request/complying, greeting/greeting, complaint/apology); have students compare these adjacency pairs with those in their own language/culture; explore with them the reasons for these differences.

• Collect or invent flaming emails or contributions to a discussion list; with students, analyse the language that indicates the flaming; have students rewrite the email in polite language.

• Demonstrate to students how affect is usually communicated through nonverbal and paralinguistic cues in face-to-face conversation; teach how to convey this affect in emails, chat and discussion lists (for example, use of capitals for stress, use of multiple vowels for stress, use of metalinguistic comments such as ‘I’m joking’).

• Provide students with an inbox with many emails (around 50); have students use some of the strategies for dealing with email mentioned above (for example, reading last first, reading by topic); have them discuss the benefits of each strategy.

• Provide students with a variety of emails and have them develop a topic for each; compare their topics and determine the characteristics of a transparent topic.

Issues to explore

Issue Explicit instruction on politeness in CMC

Since research reports that people are more likely to ‘flame’ when using CMC than when using other media of communication, do English language learners also feel less inhibited when using CMC?

Exploration – action research

• Give students free rein to contribute to the class discussion list as they choose.

• Analyse the interactions, noting specific instances of impolite or inappropriate language.

• Then, later in the term, discuss the issue of netiquette with learners and decide what are appropriate ‘rules’ for the class discussion list; assign those specific rules of interaction.

• Analyse the differences in interaction (for example, who participates, how often they participate, the language of their postings, the quality of their contributions). Did assigning specific rules make a difference?

• Given these findings, how would you approach the issue of netiquette in future classes?

Issue Unwritten vs written conventions

At the start of this chapter, Murray (1995) observes that we don’t have written rules for spoken interaction, but we do have written rules for written communication.

Exploration – questions to think about

• Why do you think there are no written rules for spoken interaction?

• If the rules are not written, how do we acquire them?

• Can you think of some of the unwritten rules?

• Can you think of examples of spoken language where we do have written rules? Why is this the case?

• Why do you think we have written rules for written communication?

• Are there examples of types of written communication where there are no written rules? Why is this the case?
From this exploration, can you think of what aspects of the context require written rules and what aspects require unwritten rules?

Issue Professional development

Many teachers find it difficult to sustain their own and students’ interaction using CMC. This book will give you some suggestions about activities you can use with your classes and further readings; however, you may want to explore the following questions:

• What voice do you want to use online with your students?
• What role do you want to take – facilitator, language expert, technical expert, coach?
• Which activities and environments are best suited to each role?
• To what extent do you want to control students’ online activities?
• To what extent do you want learners to develop into autonomous learners?

CHAPTER TWO

The genres of CMC

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) has proliferated. CMC can be in real time (often called synchronous) or non-real time (sometimes called asynchronous). Synchronous forms of CMC include chat and conferencing; asynchronous forms include email and discussion lists. In addition to learning a useful skill, when learners learn how to use CMC, they can develop their literacy skills in a variety of genres and registers. In particular, they can:

• identify the different genres in email;
• write different email genres, depending on audience and topic;
• identify the different genres in discussion lists;
• write different genres to discussion lists, depending on audience and topic;
• identify the different genres in chat;
• write different genres in chat, depending on audience and topic;
• compare the differences between texts in email, discussion lists and chat.

The need to think and respond spontaneously in the target language made students interested in learning new vocabulary and common phrases, also basic grammar. Informal writing on topics of personal interest seemed to encourage students to write, which they seldom chose to do in a classroom situation.

(Lewis 2002: 8)

Teachers found that some students, naive email users, did not recognise the different genres used in email, listservs, discussion lists or chat. Many teachers (for example, Lewis 2002) begin by having students send informal emails to the teacher, friends, family and classmates because students are free from the constraints of formal writing that needs to be error free. Much of the research on CMC notes its informality and lack of conventions used in print-based texts (see Chapter One on Netiquette).
However, as with all texts, the actual register of use depends on the situation, topic, interactants and medium. Thus, students need to be introduced to a variety of CMC genres. They need to be able to identify genres such as summary, business letters, junk mail, automatic replies, argumentation, narrative, report, information texts and so on. In many cases, learners need to be explicitly taught to recognise and use these different genres.

This is even more important if students join a public listserv/mailing list. One of Warschauer’s (2001) students who engaged in a public listserv was criticised for her lack of fluent English. Other researchers have found that learners who try to use an electronic forum to improve their English are shunned by other participants; but learners who engage in the genre of the discussion list by debating are welcomed, despite their lack of linguistic fluency (Hanna and de Nooy 2003). However, research has also shown that learners may notice the different genres and change their language to reflect native speaker peer models (for example, David and Thiede 2000) or the teacher’s email or postings (for example, Lewis 2002).

As well as the genres of CMC being various, CMC writers move among the different genres and styles, depending on the topic and audience. Learners therefore need to realise that they will write an email to a friend differently from one to a colleague or an employer. One of the difficulties, however, is that in many cases these conventions are still evolving, unlike the conventions for written language, which have been developed over centuries.

One of them was struggling to read the ‘Welcome to Hotmail’ letter, awe-struck that someone had actually taken the time to write them such a long meaningful letter.

(Lewis 2002: 4)

Regular users find themselves dealing with a great deal of email from people who they don’t know well. What is appropriate to say in this context?

(Daly 1996: 17)

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### Teaching suggestions

**Not requiring students to have Web skills**

- Collect emails of different genres; show them to students using a data projector; analyse them for audience, topic, situation; try to include emails that use inappropriate register (for example, slang and typos in an email to an employer, emails with text messaging abbreviations to a teacher/lecturer); have students compare these emails with their equivalent memos or letters from snail mail.

- Write the beginning of a text in a specific genre (for example, recount, narrative); forward the text fragment to students; have students work in groups of five; each student in the group adds consecutively to the text, each adding one sentence, keeping to the same genre conventions, until they are satisfied they have a whole, coherent text; the final text is forward to the teacher, who displays it on a data projector for the whole class. Alternatively, the texts can be uploaded to the class webpage.

- Have students keep electronic journals, emailing their responses to the teacher; have students use a discussion list as a form of journal; then have students compare the differences in their language when they are writing for an audience of the whole class, as opposed to an audience of one – their teacher.

- Collect several junk emails of the same type (for example, ‘get rich quick’; ads for toner cartridges); with the whole class, identify the genre structure and kinds of expressions common to the type; have students categorise different junk email types; have students write their own junk emails and send to each other.

- Have students compare the different types of quoting available in email – quoting the entire message at the beginning of the new message, quoting the entire message at the end of the new message or quoting one part of the previous message. What are the differences between these choices? In what circumstances is each type suitable?
Requiring students to have Web skills

- Have students register on an employment website, including completing an online résumé form; students then receive emails listing jobs available; with students, analyse the genres used in these emails.
- Have students access a website on a topic of interest or one related to a class project; using the ‘contact us’ button, have students email the company/organisation, requesting further information; have students analyse the genre of the reply (for example, how much is a form letter, how much is customised to their request).
- Have students join a public listserv (mailing list); collect five different postings and compare the genres; once learners have identified the genre(s) of the listserv, have them post their own message, using the appropriate genre; students will need to be aware that if they flout the conventions of the listserv, they could be flamed.
- Have students join a different public listserv; collect five different postings and compare the genres and register used in this listserv with the ones used in the previous listserv; in groups, have students develop a theory for the differences (for example, differences in context such as interactants, topic).
- Choose a topic of interest to the class for which students will have differing opinions; divide the class into groups; have one group engage in an email conversation on the topic; have another group engage in chat on the topic; have another group discuss the topic face-to-face; have another group discuss it in a discussion list/listserv; with students, compare the genre and register of each interaction; have students write an argument essay on the topic.

Lesson not requiring students to have Web skills

Objective: Students will be able to identify turns in and write nested email conversations; students will be able to choose how to reply to information sent via email.

Materials: Printout of nested email conversation, networked computers.

Procedure:
- With the whole class, analyse a nested email conversation, helping students to identify the markers inserted automatically by the computer program (for example, From:) or through choice by the sender (for example, >>> to represent different turns).
- Students work in pairs and are numbered.
- Student A sends an email to Student B, who responds, having chosen ‘quote previous message in reply’.
- Student A, also having chosen ‘quote previous message in reply’, responds to Student B, who responds again (for a total of four turns).
- Student A prints out the final email.
- Student pairs analyse the turn-taking in the email.
- Each pair of students writes out the ‘conversation’ as it would appear in a transcript of spoken language.

Extension:
- Students compare an email interaction in which previous messages are quoted and one in which previous messages are not quoted, looking especially at how explicit messages need to be if the original message is not quoted.
- Have students work in pairs to rewrite an email that included the previous message so that it would be clear to the reader without the original message being appended.
Lesson not requiring students to have Web skills

Objective: Students will be able to write emails in different genres.

Materials: Emails written in a variety of genres, networked computers, printer.

Procedure:

Part 1 – offline
• With the whole class, analyse an informal email sent between friends about a casual topic and a formal email sent from an employee to an employer asking for leave to attend to a family emergency.
• Have students identify the features that are the same and those that are different (for example, salutation, sign-off).
• Brainstorm casual topics with the class and have pairs of students choose among the list.

Part 2 – online
• Have students engage in an email conversation (three emails each) on their chosen topic, paying particular attention to their use of informal language.
• Have students print out their conversations.

Part 3 – offline
• Have student pairs jointly compose an email to an employer, explaining why they arrived late to work; students can use the employee email as a model.
• Have student pairs analyse the differences between their two genres of email.

Extension:
• Have students list ‘rules’ for informal emails and ‘rules’ for emails to an employer.
• Have students work in pairs to rewrite their employer email to a friend, explaining why they were late to work.

Lesson requiring students to have minimal Web skills

Objective: Students will be able to identify turns in and write threaded discussion list conversations, using appropriate register and genre.

Materials: Networked computers, printout of threaded discussion list conversation, printer.

Procedure:

Part 1 – offline
• Analyse a threaded discussion list conversation with the whole class, helping students to identify the markers inserted automatically by the computer program (for example, From:) or through choice by the sender (for example, >>> to represent different turns).
• Have students work in groups; assign each group a different topic for discussion; ensure the topics range from very personal to abstract so that students will write in a variety of genres (for example, narrative, recount, report, argument); pre-teach the features of the different genres if necessary.

Part 2 – online
• Have students post to their group’s discussion list; ensure that the discussion list has been adjusted so that it reports topic threads.
• Have students print out their group’s discussion and identify turns and genre features.

Part 3 – offline
• Compare the different discussions for turn-taking and genre features with the whole class.
• Work with students to develop a ‘theory’ of how the context shapes the generic features.
• Have groups exchange their discussions so that a group who wrote narratives exchanges with a group who wrote reports; have groups choose one posting and rewrite in a different genre.

Extension:
• Have students compare the generic features of their discussion postings with a set of their emails; help students analyse the differences so they can see that it is the context that shapes the text.
Lesson requiring students to have minimal Web skills

**Objective:** Students will be able to identify and use the linguistic features of chat conversations and compare chat with face-to-face conversation.

**Materials:** Printout of chat conversation, networked computers, printer, audiotape recorders.

**Procedure:**

Part 1 – offline
- With the whole class, analyse a chat conversation, helping students to identify the markers inserted automatically by the computer program to identify the sender or through choice by the sender (for example, a sign-off name).
- With students, choose a topic for a chat conversation.
- Brainstorm the topic in the classroom, explicitly teaching the language of agreeing, disagreeing, referring to what someone else has said, conversational openings, closing and strategies such as clarification.
- Have students, in groups, discuss the topic, practising the language skills they have just learned.

Part 2 – online
- Have students participate in a chat session on the topic.
- Print out the chat conversation.

Part 3 – offline
- Tape-record group face-to-face conversations on the same topic.
- Transcribe a portion of the conversation.
- Have students compare the transcript of a portion of the audiotaped conversation with online chat conversation to identify similarities and differences in conversational strategies such as turn-taking, openings.

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**Issues to explore**

**Issue Sustaining discussion list interaction**
Since research reports that sustaining discussion lists can be challenging, should teachers assign grades for contributions?

**Exploration – action research**
- Give students free rein to contribute to the class discussion list as they choose.
- Then, later in the term, assign specific rules for a discussion list – number of words, number of entries, how it will be graded (for example, content, language), topic for each discussion.
- Analyse the differences in interaction – for example, who participates, how often they participate, the language of their postings, the quality of their contributions. Did assigning specific rules make a difference?
- Given these findings, which style of discussion list would you assign for which purposes?

**Issue Explicit instruction**
Some research shows that learners need to be explicitly taught the linguistic features of genres; yet other research shows that learners shift style and learn genre conventions through interaction.

**Exploration – action research**
- Collect email data from learners as they interact on a listserv or conference or discussion list for a specific task (for example, writing a summary), without providing models for the interaction.
- Analyse the data to determine whether students have modelled their email interaction on those of their peers – that is, whether they have developed specific registers of use.
- Given these findings, to what extent do you think CMC genres need to be taught explicitly?

**Issue Learner empowerment**
Some research shows that asynchronous CMC gives a sense of empowerment to some students, especially those who are relatively shy or introverted or who feel discriminated against.
Exploration – questions to think about

- Why do you think asynchronous CMC such as email and discussion lists empowers students?
- Would this also likely to be true for synchronous CMC such as chat and MOOs?
- Do you think the reasons are the same or different?

CHAPTER THREE

Registering for Web-based email accounts

Teachers often include email communications in English language learning programs since learning to communicate in this medium is a relevant and useful social skill (Houston 2002). It is also a valuable tool for developing students’ written language skills (see Chapter Two). For English language students at beginner stage levels of Web communications, the online registration form for a Web-based email account is a useful tool for developing online literacy skills. In order to acquire a free Web email account, students need to complete an online registration form with a Web mail provider. To register, students need to understand the vocabulary, language forms and semiotic features associated with the form’s functions in order to complete and submit it online.

When students learn the textual structure and language forms featured in online registration forms, they develop online literacy skills that will enable them to use and interact with a wide range of Web-based services. Students can learn to use:

- vocabulary, language and textual features typical of online registration forms;
- semiotic features used in online registration forms;
- reading skills for Web-based texts;
- writing skills for online formatted texts;
- critical reading skills; and
- userids and passwords.

In a research project conducted with Australian TESOL teachers, they reported mixed levels of email experience among their students. Some students had used email accounts in their first language, others had no experience at all and a smaller number demonstrated anxiety and resistance to using computer-mediated communication in their language learning class.

A few actually had computer phobia and avoided computer class at the beginning. (King Koi 2002: 1)
Researchers have compared the first-time use of computers to entry into a new culture. They recommend that teachers ease students’ introduction to computers by providing a comfortable learning environment, a high level of support and a step-by-step approach in a format that students can readily understand (Houston 2002; Warschauer, Turbee and Roberts 1996). The Australian TESOL teachers found that they needed to structure instruction carefully. They used teacher-prepared materials in the classroom to demonstrate procedures and allow students to practise the new language (Derwent 2002; Haimd 2002; Houston 2002).

It was necessary firstly to demonstrate the various stages of Hotmail registration using screen grabs printed onto OHTs in the classroom.

(Houston 2002: 2)

Both Haimd and Houston used website registration forms and information texts as a basis for literacy development. They devised vocabulary and reading skills development exercises based on these texts, and students worked on these activities in the classroom before and after computer lab sessions.

This lesson also made it possible to do several [language] competencies, such as form-filling, reading an informal message/note, giving and following spoken instructions, as well as practice for writing a recount.

(Houston 2002: 3)

Haimd used her own spoken instructions for listening skills development. Students listened and followed instructions as they completed worksheets prepared with webpage screenshots. In a computer lab session, students followed her instructions as she explained and demonstrated the procedure. After a number of sessions, the students could follow her spoken instructions without visual support.

Some students found the concepts and vocabulary of Web email account websites unusual and daunting. They rarely encounter phrases such as userid, passwords and logins outside the Internet environment. Their teachers found that learners often became confused about the purposes of logins, passwords and email addresses, and needed to devise strategies to help students select, store and retrieve these when needed.

Teaching suggestions

Not requiring students to have Web skills

- Begin with awareness-raising discussions in the classroom so that students understand the concept of Internet-based communication before they go to the computer lab.
- For students new to Internet communication, discuss with them the means they use to communicate with friends, family and others.
- Have students draw grids that show the kinds of people they communicate with, the types of communication they engage in, and the technologies they use.
- Draw on students’ experiences of application forms to brainstorm the generic information that print-based forms often request.
- Discuss with learners the rationale for questions on email account registrations, particularly the security procedures.
- Have students work in groups to brainstorm questions for a hypothetical email account registration form.
- Take printouts of online registration forms to the classroom so that learners can compare online forms with familiar print-based forms.
- Create worksheets using printouts of email account access and registration screens to focus learners’ attention on specialised imperatives and other language features.
- Create print-based worksheets that draw attention to unique or difficult vocabulary on the email account registration screens.
- Have students contribute to a glossary of terms to be shared with the whole class.
- Encourage students to discuss meanings of glossary terms they find in their bilingual dictionaries.
- Ensure that students understand the specifications for passwords and login ids (for example, case sensitivity, number of letters, alphanumeric terms).
- Have students draw up a shortlist of login ids and passwords; if their first choice fails, they have others on stand-by.
- Help students devise a password format that is easy for them to remember.

It was necessary firstly to demonstrate the various stages of Hotmail registration using screen grabs printed onto OHTs in the classroom.

(Houston 2002: 2)
• Help students create userids that make incoming messages from classmates recognisable.
• Demonstrate registration and login procedures in the classroom, using the teacher’s computer screen and a data projector; ensure that all students have a clear view.
• Have students practise spoken instructions by directing other students to demonstrate the procedure.
• Write procedures on sentence strips for students to sequence as they observe the teacher demonstrate the procedure.
• Allow students to lead the classroom demonstration when they are familiar with the procedures and language.
• Ensure that students are familiar with the password security question.
• Have students devise and keep records of a login and password that complies with the registration procedures.
• Distribute a class list of student email addresses so that learners can easily send messages to classmates.
• Distribute worksheets that review registration procedures so that students can refer to these, rather than call for teacher assistance for every query.
• Hand out glossaries or vocabulary lists previously prepared for classroom work.
• Plan a buddy system with students, or seat less-confident students close to the teacher to monitor their progress.
• Draw attention to vocabulary and language features during a demonstration so that learners are as focused on language as on procedures.

Requiring students to have Web skills
• Before students turn on their computers, demonstrate the registration procedures, drawing their attention to the security question, login and password items, or particular areas of difficulty.
• Invite confident students to do a class demonstration of their registration.
• Have students register for several free email systems to become familiar with generic questions and procedures.

Lesson plans

Lesson not requiring students to have Web skills
Objective: Students will become familiar with features of online registration forms.
Materials: A variety of print application forms, email registration form.

Procedure:
• Discuss with students their previous experiences of application forms, and the purposes that the forms served.
• Hand out copies of a variety of application forms (for example, bank accounts, library, telephone services, jobs); choose a variety with differing security mechanisms.
• Ask students to identify generic questions (for example, name, address and contact details), and questions specific to the purpose of the form.
• Discuss technologies for completing and submitting the form (for example, pen, wordprocessor, fax, post services).
• Demonstrate an email account registration form using a data projector; elicit from students:
  – features similar to a print form
  – features unique to an online form
  – question types and purposes
  – responses.
• Complete the form using students’ suggestions for the response items.

Extension:
• Invite individual students to complete small sections of the form in order to gain experience of the online format with teacher support.
• Hand out printouts of the screens; have students complete the parts they are familiar with on the print version.
• Have students work in groups to design an online registration form that allows access to their class website.
• Have students list the information needed from applicants, gate-keeping strategies, strategies to prompt forgotten passwords.
Lesson not requiring students to have Web skills

Objective: Students will become familiar with forms and procedures for registering for an email account.

Materials: Computer and data projector.

Procedure:
• Set up a data projector and screen connected to the teacher's computer so that all students can view the teacher's screen.
• Distribute worksheets with the lesson procedure.
• Key in the url of the home page for an email account registration; students copy what the teacher does.
• Point out the layout, features and language elements on the email account home page, including:
  – name of email account provider
  – language of instructions (imperatives)
  – use of text boxes and check boxes
  – use of graphics and other features.
• Focus attention on the sign-in section for existing and new account holders.
• Discuss the differences between login and id; have students devise a login system that includes a class identifier (for example, surname_institution initial and class number).
• Have students write on their worksheet their chosen id and password; students call out their id; teacher checks that they have used the agreed naming system.
• Switch to a document view on the teacher's computer; have students come to the teacher's computer and key in their chosen id and password; teacher keeps these for future reference/use.

Extension:
• Prepare practice registration forms in a variety of formats, with fields for passwords and identity details.
• Upload the practice forms on a class website.
• Have students complete the registration forms online, print them and show their results to the teacher.

Lesson not requiring students to have Web skills

Objective: Students will be able to use vocabulary and language features of email account registration forms.

Materials: Screenshots of online registration form, overhead projector.

Procedures:
• Identify the sections of the email registration webpage with new or problematic vocabulary.
• Print screenshots of the sections; number each section in the sequence in which it occurs on screen; prepare overhead transparencies for each section.
• Organise students into groups, and give each group a numbered printout.
• Have each group discuss the vocabulary, phrases and clauses used in the screenshots.
• Have students highlight the sections that cause most difficulty and list them separately in alphabetical order, as a glossary.
• Have groups work out the meanings using dictionaries or other means and note the meanings next to items on the list.
• Have groups write up their glossary using a wordprocessor, or submit a handwritten list to the teacher.
• Have groups report on their section to the whole class, identifying the troublesome parts of their section and discussing the meanings with the whole class.
• Have one or two students in the group record new meanings supplied by the class.
• Use the glossaries to plan future lessons in order to revise these items.

Extension:
• Prepare spelling games, clozes, matching and sequencing activities based on registration form printouts to revise vocabulary and questions in the forms.
Issues to explore

Issue Literacy

Do print literacy skills equip students for dealing with Internet texts such as registration forms?

What kinds of literacy skills do students need in order to complete online registration forms?

Exploration – action research

• Review the features of print-based application forms and ask students to complete a sample application form.
• Observe and take notes on the parts that students can do easily/cause difficulty.
• Review the problem areas, exploring the cause of the difficulty.
• Demonstrate an online registration form, filling in information supplied by students.
• Take note of the sections that seem unfamiliar to students.
• Allow students to ‘get the feel’ of online forms by completing part of the form on the teacher’s computer in a group form-filling activity.
• Observe as each student completes the online registration form; note which parts are completed easily, and whether the sections that are unique to online forms are especially difficult for learners.

Issue Previous experience

Do students who have experience with using emails in their own language find it easier to learn to operate email accounts in English?

Exploration – action research

• Note which students have previous experience with email accounts; record their language and literacy levels.
• Observe the experienced students as they participate in the learning activities; note their progress and achievements in using email in English.
• Note all the areas where students have difficulties; compare the problems experienced by prior users with those of the inexperienced students.

CHAPTER FOUR

Using email accounts

Email messages are a useful means of developing students’ written communication skills in English language learning programs. In order for students to compose, send, open and read email messages, they need to recognise and use the generic functions and features of email accounts. Email account functions are generally labelled with words, images and symbols, and preparation activities for using email communications can include a focus on the language associated with email account functions.

When learners are familiar with the vocabulary and images representing email account functions, they can:

• locate new messages
• locate ‘new’ and ‘send’ message functions
• use folders to organise messages
• locate and store contact addresses
• filter low priority or unwanted messages.

Some language teachers recommend that learners be acquainted with basic computer skills and related language concepts before being introduced to email. Learners need to understand the notion of hyperlinks and pull-down menus, and know how to use a mouse for point and click operations.

In an action research project for adult learners, teachers taught beginner learners to set up and manage email accounts while learning basic email language and functions. As they learned to open, read and reply to messages, students read messages from their teacher, sent greeting cards to classmates and attached photographs to their messages (Derwent 2002; Endres 2002; Haimd 2002; Houston 2002; King Koi 2002; Lewis 2002). See Chapter Five for details on sending and retrieving attachments.

Most email accounts are based on a graphical interface, which means that program functions are represented by icons, illustrations and images. These images are intended to be familiar metaphors for well-known
functions associated with mail. For example, unread messages are shown as closed envelopes, read mail is shown as open envelopes, contact databases are represented by an address book, storage systems look like document folders, and so on. Not all learners find these icons recognisable, and teachers need to explicitly teach the meanings of these graphics (Ramm 1992, 1995).

Teachers involved in the action research project advocated a gradual introduction to email account functions and language using visuals, demonstrations, frequent revisions of the language elements and numerous opportunities for practice (Derwent 2002; Haimd 2002; Houston 2002). Teachers found it helpful to pre-teach the language and concepts in the classroom. They prepared worksheets for classroom language activities and homework revision, and students used them as learning guides in the computer lab. In the computer lab, teachers found the data projector particularly helpful for focusing attention on language elements, and for demonstrating email functions and navigation paths (Haimd 2002).

To help learners screen unwanted email, teachers demonstrated the use of filters to prevent unsolicited messages from cluttering students’ mailboxes. They used filters to bypass the mailbox and direct messages to folders created and named by the students. The learners could individually decide whether to keep, discard or respond to the messages (Haimd 2002; Lewis 2002). When learners learn to manage email account functions, they have the power to control their own email account.

Even beginner-level students can learn the skills to manage email accounts effectively, and in the process develop more confidence in their computer skills while also making substantial literacy and language learning gains (Derwent 2002; Haimd 2002; Houston 2002; King Koi 2002).

I also think the fact that they were learning computer skills at the same time as learning a language enhanced their motivation, which is an important factor in successful second language acquisition. (Endres 2002: 6)

What made this project different from the others was that the students were all long-term unemployed, Level 1 English ability, and all had very low computer literacy skills. By the end of the course all students could set up and use email … and enjoyed sharing their new skills with friends and family. (Derwent 2002: 1)

The students were surprised to find that they had many letters and wondered who had written to them. They were very happy and did not realise that these letters were automatically sent because they were getting junk mail. (Lewis, 2002: 3)
Teaching suggestions

Not requiring students to have Web skills

- Introduce beginner-level students to email accounts with a focus on visual literacy – that is, the graphics and symbols used widely in email accounts.
- Focus on language as well as computer skills, as students will need to understand and be able to use the language of email accounts.
- Encourage students who have email accounts in other languages to share their knowledge and experience with fellow students.
- Use students who are experienced with email as tutors in the computer lab, especially with groups who speak the same language.
- Help students to make sense of email account screens by introducing sections in manageable chunks.
- Allow students to practise email functions on the teacher’s computer before they use email accounts independently; assist them with identifying, naming and using email functions; let them practise in pairs and small groups in the computer lab.
- Help to make the concepts concrete for beginner students by staging role-plays about delivering, receiving and managing mail.
- Show students several email provider websites to review generic language and functions on different accounts.
- Create worksheets that model email account screens to focus attention on vocabulary, functions and graphic images.
- Have students develop glossaries to share with the whole class.
- Have students who share a language develop bilingual glossaries.
- Encourage students to compare English-only email sites with similar sites in their own language; discuss the different approaches to design, language and function.

Requiring students to have Web skills

- Teach learners how to use the address book function; demonstrate how to add email address details from incoming mail using the provider’s automatic function; demonstrate how to enter the names, email addresses and contact details of teachers, classmates and friends; have students add email addresses using both systems.
- Send messages about class events by email so that students can practise entering the details in their mailbox calendar; occasionally check calendar use by asking what they have listed for that week or semester.
- Use clear and consistent subject lines when emailing students about class events or activities; choose subject lines that are likely to be the same as their folder names.
- Send several emails with different subject lines to each student; demonstrate how to create rules to sort messages into folders; have students send emails to each other and observe how they are redirected to folders.
- Use email to advise on class schedules, class assignments, news and so on, once students can use account management techniques.
- Review account management skills each semester to update new students or to refresh previously learned skills.
- Encourage show and tell sessions where students demonstrate new techniques or account features they can use in new ways.
- Monitor email websites regularly to review any new interface designs, features and functions to bring to students’ attention.
- Teach students how to use filter functions to prevent unwanted email; show how the language in messages is used to filter unwanted mail.
- Encourage students to use options for personalising their mailbox interface; by creating their own design features, students will feel more in control of the technology.
- Teach students to identify banner and pop-up ads by the language and designs being used; have them create their own ads so they understand the techniques used to attract attention and simulate software functions.
Lesson plans

Lesson not requiring students to have Web skills

Objective: Students will be able to identify and use language associated with mail management.

Materials: Whiteboard or overhead projector.

Procedure:

- With adult learners, discuss the ways they manage incoming ordinary mail. Where do they collect it? What systems do they recommend for recording and storing mail or discarding unwanted mail?
- On a whiteboard or OHP write the language students need to express their ideas about mail— for example, action verbs, past forms of verbs, lexical items, collocations, prepositions and prepositional phrases of time and location.
- Have students work in groups to identify an effective process for receiving and storing mail, recording contact details, and discarding unwanted mail; support with language input where needed.
- Have students individually write up their process using the language elements listed on the board; have students illustrate each stage of their process with a small drawing; have students write their process on an overhead transparency.
- Have each group present their process to the class, discussing context and the rationale for the system, and the reason for their choice of illustrations.
- Review the language used in each presentation, with emphasis on the generic terms they will encounter on the email account website.

Lesson not requiring students to have Web skills

Objective: Students will be able to identify and use language associated with email account management.

Materials: Group texts from previous lesson, computer and data projector, unopened email in your account.

Procedure:

- Review the previous lesson; hand out edited copies of the groups’ texts and review the language elements.
- Review the discussion on the illustrations.
- Show the welcome page of your email service provider, using a data projector.
- Have students identify which visuals are clearly related to mail functions, and which are not (ads); remove ads as they are identified.
- Have students look at the visuals first and estimate which functions they refer to; as students make suggestions, have them come to the computer and click on them, and observe the result; during this process discuss how effective the visuals are in demonstrating functions.
- Have students identify generic parts of the screen— for example, email provider name, email address, inbox, sign-out button, folders, address books, mail options, etc.
- Refer learners to their documented process; have students suggest a first action; have one student locate the function’s icon and click on it, so that the class can observe the result.
- Have students suggest and enact further stages of the process, from opening and reading mail to deciding where and how to store it and to finally discarding it. (During lesson preparation, ensure there is unopened mail that you’re happy for students to see.)
- Repeat names, functions and actions often as learners observe each other clicking on account functions.
- Have students instruct each other or describe actions using the relevant language items.
- Check at each step whether the students perceive the processes to be logical and intuitive.
- Allow everyone in the class an opportunity to perform the functions individually, or in pairs.
Lesson requiring students to have limited Web skills

Objective: Students will practise email account management skills.

Materials: Networked computers, access to email (through an email client or service provider).

Procedure:
• Prior to the lesson, send emails to learners, each with a different subject line; have teaching or administration colleagues send an information notice by email to all students – for example, institution opening hours, course and term dates, upcoming events.
• Seat learners at computers alone, in pairs or groups according to their prior experience, skills and needs; seat learners with high support needs close to the teacher.
• Have students log onto their email account, as taught in previous lessons.
• Have students state what information is visible on their screens (various ads, number of messages).
• Demonstrate the procedure for deleting ads; have students do the same on their screens; help learners who inadvertently click on the ad by instructing them on how to get back to their account, rather than doing it for them.
• Direct students’ attention to their inbox; ask how many unopened messages they have from the teacher, and what the subject line tells them; discuss which messages they need to retain, and which they can discard.
• Have students locate the folders section and describe where it is on the screen: ‘top left’, ‘below the inbox’, ‘above the trash’; encourage a wide range of responses to allow practice of prepositional phrases.
• Demonstrate the procedure for creating and naming folders, and discuss possible names for folders that will house mail currently in their inbox.
• Have individual students come to the teacher’s computer and create and name a folder so the class can see it on the projected screen; rectify them if necessary and let students try again; when everyone has created a folder under teacher supervision, have them create and name folders in their own accounts; help individual students where necessary, and recruit better students to help their classmates.
• Demonstrate how to move mail from the inbox to a folder, using the data projector; recite your actions as you do it; repeat several times.
• Have students tell you what they did, using the relevant lexical items and action verbs.
• Have students give a chronological account of what they did in the lesson: ‘First I logged into my account, and then I deleted the ads …’; and so on.

Extension:
• Have students write an account of the lesson procedure, or a set of instructions on how to create and name folders.
Issues to explore

Issue: Literacy
What kinds of literacy skills do students need to manage an email account?

Exploration – action research
• Document the level of computer literacy skills among your students; note who is comfortable with using computers and the Internet and who is fairly new to the experience.
• Track students’ progress, and at the end of the course analyse the results in the light of learner characteristics, language and literacy levels, previous computer experience and other relevant information.
• Note the use of language on the email account screens; list the lexical items that students would have encountered before on the Internet, or in print.
• Note the style of language used in the account – is it formal, colloquial, impersonal or ‘friendly’?
• When your students first open the email account screen, observe and document their responses to the language; note which items are unfamiliar, and how they are presented on the screen.
• Give students reading tasks for finding information/functions by name, and for recognising them by a graphical representation; compare the results.
• Give students reading tasks which involve finding the same kind of information on several different email account sites; note how well they transfer their reading skill to differently designed screens.
• Take notes on the functions and sections of the account that students can do easily, or have most difficulty with.

CHAPTER FIVE

Sending and retrieving attachments

As learners develop their ability to send and retrieve attachments, they will learn to integrate a variety of literacy skills – wordprocessing, spreadsheets and email. When learners learn how to send and retrieve attachments, they will be able to:

• compose information offline, making use of the editing and formatting functions of a wordprocessor, rather than composing important information online directly into email;
• attach information from other sources, such as an e-greeting or content from a website;
• retrieve a wordprocessed or spreadsheet attachment and file it;
• forward a document or image they have received to another person.

While sending and retrieving attachments is a technical skill that learners will likely need for their work and social lives, it also provides opportunities for language learning. Learners need to...

On one occasion, he had to change his lesson plan for the day as a student who had just had a baby boy attended the lesson and everyone was excited about having him back. He decided to have students send an e-greeting card to their classmate to congratulate him for the birth of his first baby instead of having them write a recount to be sent as an attachment.

(Vazquez 2002: 38)
Teachers have found that students are engaged in the process of sending additional information to their classmates or friends and family. In adult immigrant settings, they especially love sending greetings, postcards and photos (for example, Houston 2002; King Koi 2002) or receiving greetings (for example, Derwent 2002). Some students even engaged their friends and families – taking, attaching and sending photos of family activities such as a new car, a son’s graduation or photos of family members overseas (Derwent 2002). In other settings (for example, Cummins and Sayers 1995; Warschauer 1999), they enjoy sending content to share for collaborative projects. As well as leading to the acquisition of computer and language skills, such activities contribute to class cohesion and motivation.

However, teachers have also found that they need to demonstrate these techniques offline, using a data projector or overhead projector. They’ve also noted that they need to very specifically assign a recipient for the email and its attachment. One teacher, for example, ‘had to stipulate that they send their photo to someone else in the class, and allot partners to them, so that I had some means of checking that it had worked’ (Houston 2002: 3).

Teachers have also noted that the pre-teaching that is needed offline to teach learners how to send attachments can also be used to assess (and teach) other aspects of language, such as how to respond to complex spoken instructions or reading a procedural text (for example, Haimd 2002).

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**Teaching suggestions**

Not requiring students to have Web skills

- Demonstrate procedures for creating attachments offline first, using a data or overhead projector.
- Turn off students’ monitors while giving instructions or demonstrating a task, to avoid the hypnotic effect of a flickering monitor.
- Have students write their CVs or résumés and send them as an attachment to each other, in preparation for responding to job advertisements.
- Use a digital camera to take photos of students and have them send them to friends and family overseas.
- Use a digital camera to take photos of students; send them to each student and have students add a brief written description of themselves; students can then print out their photo and description to display in the classroom.
- Have students copy their photos and/or their descriptions to the teacher, who can display them to the whole class using the data projector, put them on a class webpage or burn them onto a CD for the class to have as a memento of their group.
- Have groups of students do collaborative projects where they need to send attachments of work they have created individually.
- Have students write an essay and send it as an attachment to a peer for peer comment, prior to revision.
- Have students design their own greeting card using a wordprocessor, clip art and borders, and email their cards to each other as attachments.
- Model by sending the course outline as an attachment; have students retrieve the course outline and print it out.
- Model by sending photos as an attachment; have students retrieve the photos and resend them to another student.
- Model by sending homework exercises or classroom tasks as attachments; have students complete the tasks offline and send them back as attachments.
- With the class, develop a brief questionnaire (for example, on favourite foods, on weather preferences, on pets); have students email...
their keypals (see Chapter Six) inviting them to complete the questionnaire; students also complete the questionnaire; students then share the data in class and draw a graph of the preferences; each student sends the graph as an attachment to their keypal.

- Have students ‘interview’ a keypal, write a biography of the keypal and send it to the class as an attachment.
- Have groups of students do collaborative projects where they need to send and receive attachments of work they have created individually.
- Have students write a paragraph or an essay and send it as an attachment to a peer for peer comment, prior to revision.
- Have students send class assignments to the teacher as attachments; mark them using the comment and redline features of a wordprocessor and send them back to students as attachments; have students revise their work.

### Requiring students to have Web skills

- Access websites that have e-greetings and have students send e-greetings to each other.
- Access e-postcard sites for the town or city where students live, and have them email them to friends and family in their home countries.
- Have students read a local newspaper online, cut and paste an article of interest and send it to friends and family; have students check that they are not breaking copyright.
- Have students interview a classmate, write a biography of the classmate and load it onto the class webpage; have other students in the class guess who the student is.
- Have groups of students do collaborative projects where they need to send and receive attachments of work they have found on the Web (for example, different information on a project about a particular country or culture).
- Have groups of students do collaborative projects in their field of study where they need to send and receive attachments of work they have created individually through searching the Web.

### Lesson plans

#### Lesson not requiring students to have Web skills

**Objective:** Students will be able to open an attachment, save it in a folder and forward it.

**Materials:** Digital camera, networked computers.

**Procedure:**
- Teacher takes photos of all students using a digital camera.
- Teacher emails photos individually to each student.
- Students save their photo in a file.
- Teacher demonstrates, using the data projector, how to reformat (enlarge and shrink) photos.
- Students reformat their own photo.
- Students save their reformatted photo.
- Students email their photo to a specific class member.

**Extension:** Requires students to have Web skills.
- Students post their photos on the class webpage.
- Students send their own photo and a photo of the entire class to a friend or family member – that is, send two attachments to the one email.
- Students send their photo to a partner, who writes a brief description of the student and sends it to their partner; students post their photo, with the description, on the class webpage.

#### Lesson not requiring students to have Web skills

**Objective:** Students will be able to write a comparison/contrast text offline and send it as an attachment to a mailing list.

**Materials:** Networked computers.

**Procedure:**
- Students interview a keypal about their life; students need to be given topics of information to ask for (for example, food, sports, hobbies, families, work, homes).
- Each student pair writes a comparison/contrast text, explaining the similarities and differences between the life of the keypal and their
own life; it's useful to do this activity after a biography so that students will have learned the textual structure and language needed to describe someone’s life.

- Students send their text to their teacher as an attachment; teacher responds using MS-Word comment and track changes features.
- Have students revise their text, based on teacher feedback.
- Have students send their text as an attachment to their class.

**Extension:**
- Have students post their texts on the class webpage (requires Web skills).
- Have students exchange texts with a partner and make suggestions for revision, instead of the teacher.

**Lesson not requiring students to have Web skills**

**Objective:** Students will be able to use attachments to collaborate in order to write texts in different genres.

**Materials:** Data projector or overhead projector.

**Procedure:**
- Have students work in groups of five.
- Assign each student in the group a different genre/text type.
- Have each student begin a text in that genre, and email it as an attachment round-robin style to the next student, who adds two sentences to the text.
- Continue in this fashion until each of the five students has contributed to the text.
- The last student contribution should conclude the text.
- Show texts on the data or overhead projector, or post on classroom walls.

**Extension:**
- Have students upload their texts to the class webpage (requires Web skills).
- Have each student write a paragraph of a text in a specific genre, round-robin style.

**Lesson requiring students to have Web skills**

**Objective:** Students will be able to collaborate on a project in which they retrieve information from the Web, write a report and share information.

**Materials:** Networked computers.

**Procedure:**
- Have each group of students choose a topic for their project (for example, movies, Australian animals, restaurants, country).
- Have each student choose one aspect of the topic (for example, a particular movie, Australian animal, restaurant or city).
- Have each student search the Web for a photo and information on their chosen aspect of the topic.
- Have each student copy a photo and write a report on their particular aspect of the topic.
- Have each student email the photo and report to other members of the group.
- Have students decide in face-to-face groups how to present their project to the class, using a presentation program.
- Have groups present their joint project to the class.

**Extension:**
- Have students copy a graph from a website, write a brief description of the graph, and mail the graph and description to the class.
- Have students post their presentation on the class webpage.

**Note:** Copying photos from the Web and writing reports based on searching the Web are taught in another volume in this series, *Using the Web to support language learning.*
**Keypals**

Keypal projects are a means of facilitating authentic, purposeful communication between different groups of students in similar language learning situations. Students communicate with native speakers in the target language, or with language learners like themselves. In keypal projects, students can correspond on topics set by the teacher, or conduct their own personal exchanges. They can communicate one to one with a keypal, in pairs, groups or class to class, depending on their language needs and skills. Keypal projects can be set up between local classes within a school, across state and national borders, or as combinations of these.

In task-based keypal projects, learners can communicate with teachers and students in other classes to develop:
- written communication skills
- interaction strategies
- intercultural awareness.

Reports by teachers and researchers describe many benefits of keypal projects for teachers and language learners (Fedderholdt 2001; Hackett 1996). Keypal projects allow learners to communicate in the target language with fellow students and others in meaningful and purposeful ways. Teachers and researchers report that genuine communications are highly motivating for students. The authenticity of the communication encourages learners to strive for greater accuracy and fluency in order to make their messages comprehensible to the reader.

Teachers report that keypal projects can have a positive effect on student language skills. Researchers have observed that when learners interact with others in email projects, they produce more complex texts than when writing ‘hypothetical’ texts to be read by their teacher. When students are also allowed to select the topics and content of the texts, they produce more messages, more complex sentences and use richer and more diverse vocabulary (Li 2000; Fedderholdt 2001; Stockwell and Levy 2001).

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**Issue Teaching offline**

Do students benefit from having particular skills demonstrated offline?

**Exploration – action research**
- Demonstrate how to send an e-greeting, using the overhead projector.
- Have students send an e-greeting to a classmate.
- Observe and take notes on whether students can do the task easily, what questions they ask and what problems they have.
- Demonstrate how to send an article from an online newspaper, using the data projector, being careful to observe copyright laws.
- Have students send an article from an online newspaper to a classmate, being careful to observe copyright laws.
- Observe and take notes on whether students can do the task easily, what questions they ask and what problems they have.
- Decide which demonstration medium is most effective for your learners – overhead projector or data projector.

**Issue Emotional engagement**

Does sending and receiving emails with attachments, especially photos and greetings, motivate students?

**Exploration – questions to think about**
- Think about your particular learners. What types of attachments would motivate them? Why?
- Think about learners in an entirely different context from yours. What types of attachments would motivate them? Why?

**Issue Flexibility**

Vazquez (2002) quotes a teacher who changed his lesson plan to take advantage of a ‘learning moment’.

**Exploration – questions to think about**
- What advice do you have for other teachers about how to be flexible?
- How can teacher education and professional development programs teach such flexibility?
Students enjoy the immediacy of email communication and appreciate that they can take time to draft and hone their messages before sending them. An advantage for teachers is that they can monitor the writing process from the initial brainstorming phase to the final draft (Belisle 1996; Gonglewski et al 2001).

In the classroom, teachers use techniques such as pairwork and groupwork tasks to encourage sustained interaction between students (Stockwell 2001). Teachers can use email exchanges for similar purposes and can help students to prepare, first by ensuring that they are familiar with the technology, and second by setting up a project framework with a set of tasks or topics. Most keypal teachers recommend that teachers provide initial guidance on topics, tasks and language input, although many studies show that there is great value in giving students the opportunity and requisite language skills to explore areas of common interest with their email partners (Stockwell 2001).

Teachers can help students to learn pragmatic skills such as opening and closing conversations, introducing new topics, and strategies for maintaining the interaction. Learners will need to be aware that, although they can use an informal style of interaction with keypals, email is essentially a written form of communication that relies on lexical and syntactical choices to convey meaning.

In spoken language interactions, students can employ intonation and body language to enhance their meaning. As these strategies are not available in email communication, many people improvise with emoticons, small symbols created with computer keys which are used to express feelings or soften meanings.

They found it rewarding to make discoveries about a culture with which they had been almost completely unfamiliar.
Fedderholdt 2001: 280

An often-mentioned benefit of intercultural keypal projects is that they offer valuable opportunities for learners to interact with students from other cultures. While collaborating as members of a global learning community, they can enhance their awareness and understanding of their own culture while exploring the social and communications practices of cultures different from their own (Ho 2000; Fedderholdt 2001).

### Teaching suggestions

#### Not requiring students to have Web skills
- Discuss the notion of ‘penpals’ with students; find out who has had penpals, how they communicate, what they talk about.
- Find or write a human interest story about penpals who meet after many years of writing, sharing their experiences and exchanging photos; discuss with students the motivation for these penpals.
- Make initial contact with the teacher of your keypal project and together plan it before the students’ first exchange; ensure that both teachers are comfortable about the project goals, outcomes and procedures.
- Plan classroom-based activities to prepare students for the keypal project.
- Share the results of class discussions and students’ ideas with the keypal teacher.
- Brainstorm possible interaction topics; have students prioritise topics and add their individual ideas to the class list.
- Ensure that students are clear about the project goals, especially the role that keypal interactions have in it.
- Have students create a glossary of emoticons to share with their keypals, especially cross-cultural emoticons.
- Plan ways to provide feedback and error correction; if individual feedback isn’t feasible, address common problem areas in whole class or group language lessons.

#### Requiring students to have Web skills
- Use a search engine to find keypal websites for ESL students – ESL websites such as Dave’s ESL Cafe are a good starting point.
- Find a class with similar characteristics to your class, such as similar age group, language level or syllabus focus.
- Take digital photos of teacher and students to exchange with a keypal class; students need to give permission for their photo to be sent.
• Before beginning communications with the keypal class, ensure that all students have an email account, are familiar with registration and sign-in procedures, and can use the account without teacher assistance.

• Have students do preliminary research on the location of their new keypals, searching the Web for information on the country, city or school before their first contact.

• Explore the language of email communication with students; have them practise conversation opening and closing strategies, and ways of introducing new topics, using email.

• Ensure that students understand the basic principles of netiquette (see Chapter One), and how the pragmatics of communication can differ across cultures even when both parties are communicating in English.

• Devise practice of written communication tasks where students have to express humour, deference, empathy, approval or other aspects of appraisal.

• Allow students to practise informal email communications among themselves; have them cc the emails to the teacher so the teacher can monitor their progress and intervene where difficulties occur.

• Set a topic (or invite students to suggest a topic) for a class email discussion; monitor the discussion to ensure all learners participate.

Lesson plans

Lesson not requiring students to have Web skills

Objective: Students will be able to prioritise communication topics for an intercultural keypal project.

Materials: Flowcharts or mindmaps.

Procedure:

• Use flowcharts, diagrams and mindmaps to outline the project design and how it relates to language learning and related coursework.

• Discuss the goals of the project, the communication tasks required and the role that the keypal interactions have in meeting the goals.

• Ask students to work in groups and brainstorm topics they’d like to discuss in conversations with their keypals.

• Lead a session that helps the class refine student ideas until they reach consensus on a short list of topics.

• Ask all students to prioritise the topics they want to explore with their keypals; have them add two more choices according to their personal interests (for example, popular music); collect the lists from each student, or ask for them to be emailed to you after class.

• Discuss the interpersonal information that students think is appropriate to share with keypals (for example, their age, gender, family background, career goals and personal interests); practise the language they’ll need to convey this information.

• Give students a handout detailing assignment and assessment tasks, and expectations for their participation, including the number and frequency of email messages required throughout the project.

Extension:

• Have groups discuss one communication topic each.

• Encourage students to explore the different views in the group.

• Ask one or two groups to report back to the whole class on the similarities and differences of views in the group.

• Have students comment on how they responded to the different views expressed and reflect on the strategies they used to express interest, surprise, agreement and polite disagreement.

• Have students consider language strategies they can use to express these functions in email messages to their keypals.
Lesson not requiring students to have Web skills

Objective: Students will be introduced to the social practice and linguistic features associated with informal writing.

Materials: Birthday cards, thank-you notes, postcards, audiotape recorder, recordings of casual phone messages and communications, sample emails, networked computers, overhead or data projector.

Procedure:
• Have students work in groups to draw up lists of important dates and events in their lives.
• Discuss with students the kinds of informal communications they have around these events in spoken and/or written form.
• Display sample birthday cards, thank-you notes, postcards; play recordings of brief casual phone messages or communications.
• Have students list additional examples of casual or informal interaction.
• Have students note any common features (for example, salutations, openings, closings, sign-offs, colloquialisms) on prepared worksheets.
• Distribute sample email communications with similar features; have students identify the purpose of the message, and features such as salutations and closings; have students compare these with the ones used in cards and casual conversation.
• In the computer lab, have students in pairs send an informal message to their partner for the purposes of: an invitation to a casual social event, to pass on some good news, to request assistance from a friend.
• Display good models drawn from the student emails on an OHP or using the data projector, pointing out salient features.

Extension:
• Have students work in groups to prepare an informal invitation to another class for afternoon tea; help students practise casual greetings, introducing themselves, raising topics of conversation, turn-taking and leave-taking.
• Organise class-based email exercises so that students can practise using email interaction strategies with each other, encouraging them to report on issues or difficulties they encounter.

Lesson requiring students to have limited Web skills

Objective: Students will be able to introduce themselves to their keypals.

Materials: Overhead or data projector, networked computers.

Procedure:
• Brainstorm and list on the whiteboard the information about themselves that students would like to share with their keypals – for example, (if child) name, age, school, family members, pets, favourite music, sports, etc.
• Elicit phrases they can use – for example, ‘I’ve got … (two sisters)’, ‘I like …’, ‘I can …’, ‘I’m interested in …’.
• Have students draft an email in which they introduce themselves, and send it to the teacher.
• Have some students demonstrate their introduction using the overhead or data projector.
• Help students who have difficulty with the language, but do not correct all errors; informal email interaction is more tolerant of error than other forms of writing.

Extension:
• Form groups of four to five students.
• Have students send their messages of introduction to each other.
• Ask students to reply to each other and comment on one interesting feature in the introduction.
Lesson requiring students to have limited Web skills

Objective: Students will be able to elicit personal information from their keypals.

Materials: Networked computers.

Procedure:
- Brainstorm ideas for the kinds of questions students might want to ask their keypals; ask what they would like to know about their new friends.
- List the suggestions on the board and ask students to note down the items of information they’re most interested in.
- Work with students to identify the question forms they can use to elicit information from their keypals – for example, ‘Wh …’ questions and common forms such as ‘Do you …?’ and ‘Are you …?’.
- Have students practise these forms by emailing questions to two or more current classmates, and responding to the questions they receive.

Issues to explore

Issue Writing a variety of genres
Can keypal projects be used to develop students’ writing skills in a variety of genres?

Exploration – action research
- Include written genres, such as short reports, recounts of events, or book and film reviews, when setting communication tasks for the learners’ keypal project.
- Pre-teach the structure and language elements of the genres that your students are to use in their communication tasks.
- Document how well students use them over the period of the project, using a checklist of the genre features you teach.
- Use your checklist to evaluate students’ progress in writing these kinds of texts at the end of the course.

Issue Error correction
What error correction techniques are appropriate for learners developing their writing skills in keypal projects?

Exploration – action research
- Explain to students that you want to trial different methods of error correction.
- Choose two or three error correction techniques to trial.
- Keep notes of the kinds of errors you encounter, which students have difficulty, and the correction technique you use.
- Discuss your methods with the students at the end of the course and ask which of your techniques helped most to improve their writing.
- Analyse students’ writing to evaluate the techniques trialled.
CHAPTER SEVEN

Chat

Chat is a synchronous, real-time mode of online communication. While chat is often available in work settings as instant messaging (IM), where a real-time message will pop onto the screen while the worker is engaged in other computer work, chat is used primarily in the form of chatrooms. Chatrooms are set up in work, education, and commercial settings. In many cases, chatrooms are for people interested in a particular topic or idea.

In addition to learning a useful skill, when learners learn how to use chat, they can make measurable gains in language learning (Freiermuth 2002) because they can:

• engage in real-time conversations with classmates;
• interact in an authentic context with native speakers;
• become motivated and empowered to take more control of their own learning;
• study their own ‘conversations’;
• notice their own language use and that of native speakers;
• engage in collaborative language activities;
• participate more than in face-to-face conversations; and
• converse with peers without the embarrassment of misunderstanding due to pronunciation difficulties.

Many communication strategies and speech functions are effectively learnt and can be observed in chats. Extending the range and complexities of these features is part of the learning process. Some of this develops through acquisition and experiences. Some of the learning occurs as a simple response to a previous question or statement.

(Joomjaroen 2000: 11)

Chat is one of the more familiar examples of synchronous CMC. Chat exchanges have been shown to promote fluency rather than accuracy (Beauvois 1992; Lee 2002) because of the features of synchronous, real-time communication, which puts constraints on communication that are not present in email or discussion lists. Chat requires excellent keyboard skills, and often language learners cannot type rapidly in English, resulting in the screen scrolling down and the conversation moving onto another topic before they’ve had time to comment. The rapid scrolling of the screen also means they need to be able to read quickly, another skill that is quite difficult for many language learners. In public chatrooms, students may also encounter topics and language that are inappropriate in their culture.

These problems can be overcome by first introducing students to chat with their peers and teacher. A second stage is to engage in chat conversations with selected native speakers, friends and colleagues of the teacher, for example. This provides learners with practice opportunities before they step out into the public world of chatrooms.

Research on chat in language learning indicates ways in which chat facilitates language acquisition: opportunities for collaboration (Freiermuth 2002), increased motivation (Skinner and Austin 1999), decreased stress (Lee 2002), and more equitable contributions (Freiermuth 2001; Lee 2002); however, other research indicates unequal participation (Xie 2002). To facilitate collaboration and equal participation, Freiermuth (2002) recommends dividing the class into groups of no larger than 15 and assigning each group to a different chatroom.

Joomjaroen provided an example of a chat between strangers, two distance learning students who had never met. While they began with fairly formulaic self-introductions and questions (for example, ‘Where are you from?’), they quickly began to communicate more freely and familiarly, despite being strangers.

This … demonstrates the typical development of a successful conversation between strangers who find they have something in common and gain a sense of understanding and closeness from their interaction. The conversation was sustained for over an hour.

(Joomjaroen 2000: 21)
Teaching suggestions

Not requiring students to have Web skills
For these activities, use a classroom-based chat software package such as the free L.E.C.S. – that is, conduct the activities in a controlled environment.

- Demonstrate how a chatroom works by typing a message on one computer and having one student reply; use the data projector to show the screens to the class.
- Discuss with students the potential problems with chat conversations (for example, slow typing speed, inaccurate English); have students create a list of ground rules to follow when they use chat; some such ground rules might include:
  - use a dictionary as you compose
  - check spelling before posting
  - realise you don’t have to reply to everyone’s comments or questions
  - you can always leave a chatroom if you feel uncomfortable.
- Initially, have students explore the chatroom without any specific instructions/tasks.
- Introduce students to chatroom vocabulary (for example, post, profile, whisper, lurk).
- Have students practise introducing themselves in the classroom, and then have them, in groups, introduce themselves to each other via chat.
- Have students practise greetings and closures in the classroom, and then have them, in groups, practise greetings and closures in a chatroom.
- Have students practise conversation strategies such as clarifying, asking for explanations in the classroom.
- Assign students to groups (no larger than 15); create separate chatrooms for each group, using a chat software program such as L.E.C.S.; give each group a topic for their chat conversation; have students print out the transcript and review their use of conversation strategies, including opening and closing.

• Have students interview a partner using chat; have students print off the transcript and review their questions; have them revise their questions and, using their new, improved questions, interview another classmate.
• Have students choose a nickname that they do not tell anyone else in the class; have them enter the chatroom using that nickname; after ten minutes or so of chat conversation, print out the transcript; have students guess the identity of each person in the chatroom.

Requiring students to have Web skills
For these activities, have students use a public chatroom; check the chatroom carefully to ensure it is culturally and linguistically appropriate for the learners. Also, warn students about the possibility of flaming.

- Using the data projector, demonstrate how to get into a public chatroom.
- Have students register in a public chatroom and lurk.
- Have students print out a conversation they observe; have them work in groups to trace the threads of each person’s contribution and to learn new vocabulary; have them share their findings with the whole class.
- Practise asking questions in the classroom; have students participate in a public chatroom by asking questions of participants; this helps students maintain control of their own contributions; remind them that they can withdraw from the chatroom at any time if they feel uncomfortable.
- Have students analyse transcripts of chat conversations to determine whether there are gender-based or cultural differences in conversational styles in chatrooms.
- Have advanced students interview an important person in their field of study and write a report on that person’s life; pre-teach the language of polite questioning and sociocultural conventions regarding requesting personal information.
Lesson plans

Lesson not requiring students to have Web skills

Objective: Students will be able to identify turns in chat conversations.

Materials: Printout of chat conversation, audiotape recorder for extension activity.

Procedure:
• Analyse a chat conversation with the whole class, helping students to identify the markers inserted automatically by the computer program to identify the sender or through choice by the sender (for example, a sign-off name).
• Have students mark the contributions by person.
• Have students summarise what each participant has contributed to the chat conversation.
• Discuss with students the overlapping nature of chat conversation.
• Have students identify the reasons for this overlap (for example, time delays in typing).
• Have students develop strategies for contributing to chat so that they are not overwritten by faster typists and more fluent language users.

Extension:
• Tape-record group face-to-face conversations.
• Transcribe a portion of the conversation.
• Have students compare the turn-taking in the transcript of a portion of the audiotaped conversation with that in the online chat conversation.
• Discuss with students the conventions of turn-taking in face-to-face conversation in most English-speaking cultures (for example, giving the floor, latching rather than overlapping); have them compare these conventions with those in their L1 culture.

Lesson requiring students to have Web skills

Objective: Students will be able to identify the linguistic features of chat conversations.

Materials: Printout of chat conversation, networked computers, printer.

Procedure:
Part 1 – offline
• With the whole class, analyse a chat conversation, helping students to identify the markers inserted automatically by the computer program to identify the sender or through choice by the sender (for example, a sign-off name).
• With the whole class, analyse the same chat conversation, helping them to identify the linguistic features common in chat, such as stating an opinion, agreeing, disagreeing, questioning, offering advice, politeness markers.
• Choose a topic for a chat conversation with students.
• Brainstorm the topic in the classroom.
• Explicitly teach the language of stating an opinion, agreeing, disagreeing, referring to what someone else has said, questioning, politeness markers.
• Have students, in groups, discuss the topic, practising the language skills they have just learned.

Part 2 – online
• Have students participate in a small group chat session on the topic.
• Print out each group’s chat conversation.

Part 3 – offline
• Have students analyse their conversation for the linguistic features taught: stating an opinion, agreeing, disagreeing, referring to what someone else has said, questioning, politeness markers.
• Reteach linguistic features as necessary.
Lesson requiring students to have Web skills

**Objective:** Students will be able to use chat to complete a project/task.

**Materials:** Networked computers, willing friends and colleagues.

**Procedure:**

**Part 1 – offline**
- Teach the language of interview, helping students to ask open-ended and follow-up questions; teach the genre of report if necessary.
- Brainstorm with the class, the types of information they would gather when interviewing someone from another country (for example, language, population, size, geography, food).
- Have students work in pairs to interview each other face-to-face and then write a report on their partner’s country; reverse roles and repeat the exercise; the information could be recorded on a grid developed through the brainstorm activity.

**Part 2 – online**
- Find willing friends and colleagues in other countries who would be happy to be interviewed via chat.
- Allocate an interviewee to each student (or pair of students).
- Have students interview their assigned partner via chat.
- Have students write a report on their partner’s country.
- The reports can be posted on the class webpage, shared with the class using the data projector, or posted on paper around the classroom walls.

**Extension:**
- Have students exchange photos with their overseas partners.
- Have students go to the Web to find a map of their partner’s country and pictures of significant landmarks.
- Have students incorporate their digital pictures into their report.
- Have students post their reports on the class webpage.

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Lesson requiring students to have Web skills

**Objective:** Students will be able to participate in a public chatroom.

**Materials:** Networked computers, printer.

**Procedure:**

**Part 1 – offline**
- Brainstorm with students topics of interest to them.

**Part 2 – online**
- Identify public chatrooms on those topics that are culturally and linguistically appropriate for the students.
- Have students work in pairs to sign up for one of the chatrooms.
- Have students lurk on the chatroom.
- Have students print out a short conversation from the chatroom.
- Have students analyse the average length of each turn.
- Have students identify two or three questions they could ask in the chatroom.
- Have students go back to the chatroom, ask their question and record the response; have them repeat this two or three times.
- Debrief with students; ask them how they felt about the experience, whether they were intimidated by the language, the speed of the chat or any other issues such as flaming.

**Extension:**
- Have students participate in another ‘safe’ chatroom for homework and have them report back to the class.
**Issues to explore**

**Issue Facilitating language learning**
Since some research reports that learners using chat quickly begin to use the abbreviations that are becoming conventions in online chat and SMS messaging, are students really learning English?

**Exploration – action research**
- Have students, in groups, engage in chat to solve a particular task collaboratively.
- Print out the chat conversation; analyse it for features of written language and for features of ‘online’ language.
- Have students engage in chat in an online public chat group that is culturally and linguistically suitable for English language learners.
- Print out the chat conversation and compare it with the initial chat conversation when students were interacting only with each other.
- Did learners adopt some of the online language of others in the chatroom?
- Given your findings, in future courses would you choose to have students use chat only with each other or with public chat groups?

**Issue Explicit instruction**
Some research shows that learners need to be explicitly taught the linguistic features of genres; yet other research shows that learners shift style and learn genre conventions through interaction.

**Exploration – action research**
- Collect chat data from learners, without providing models or instruction for the interaction; as the teacher, provide models of conversational strategies and feedback (for example, ‘That’s great!’).
- Analyse the data to determine whether students have modelled their chat interaction on those of the teacher and their peers – that is, whether they have developed specific registers of use, vocabulary and conversation strategies.
- Given these findings, to what extent do you think the linguistic features of chat need to be taught explicitly? How would you assess language learning?

**CHAPTER EIGHT**

**Discussion lists**

Web-based discussion lists can be used to help students develop interaction skills and independent learning strategies. When students contribute to asynchronous discussions, they can draft and edit their messages before posting them, and can read and post messages at a time and place convenient for them. Teachers with access to software such as WebCT, Blackboard and Web Board can mount an online forum for their own class, or to share with other classes. Using class-based discussion lists, students can communicate with their teacher and classmates, and engage in individual or group learning projects. Internet-based discussion sites for ESL learners allow them to communicate with other students about language learning.

Some teachers encourage their students to contribute to public discussion forums on the Internet. Many prominent news sites have online discussion forums in which language learners can interact with native speakers on topics of social interest. When language learners participate in public forums, they can learn some of the cultural and discourse conventions in the language they are learning. At the same time they develop online communication skills that may be useful for personal, workplace or educational purposes.

With discussion lists, students can:
- participate in individual, small group or large group discussions;
- develop interaction skills in authentic communication tasks associated with group and class projects;
- engage in authentic communications with native speakers of the language under instruction;
- learn the cultural and discourse conventions observed by native speakers in online discussion forums;
- monitor their own progress in language learning through reflection on their interactions in discussion forums.
Teachers and researchers have explored the ways electronic discussion forums can be used to further learning and language skills development. Some have investigated learner motivation, attitudes and performance, comparing face-to-face and online discussion (Warschauer 1996; Ellis 2001).

They report that many students found online discussion groups flexible and convenient to use. They reported that online discussion is more equitable than face-to-face discussion, with more students in their groups participating. Students with a reflective learning style were able to participate more, and the asynchronous nature of the discussion allowed a more considered response. Students felt free to express opinions, to express themselves creatively, and liked being able to backtrack and reread messages (Warschauer 1996; Ellis 2001).

Researchers have observed students’ use of and attitudes to the language of electronic discussion. Warschauer (1996) noted that the language his students used in electronic discussion was more formal and more lexically and syntactically complex than the language they used in face-to-face discussion. Ellis’s students were familiar with the conventions of electronic writing and appeared comfortable with the medium (one of his students describing it as ‘say writing – a cross between writing and speech’) (Ellis 2001: 173), indicating their ease with using symbols and short forms to communicate meaning. However, others found that the lack of visual cues such as body language made it difficult to assess and convey emotions in messages.

Experienced teachers say that online discussion forums can be a positive learning experience that with careful planning can open up new learning pathways. Some teachers have found it helpful to develop an ‘orientation’ module to stage students’ entry to the online communication environment. Brace-Govan and Wagstaff (2001) offered an orientation to online learning that combined familiarisation with the technological functions with a socialisation program. They facilitated students’ social interaction by modelling appropriate language and textual formatting, by providing a forum for students to practise with their peers, and by supporting their engagement with the wider institution.

Online discussion lists are used by language teachers to help learners develop skills in writing, interaction, online discourse, intercultural communication, and group and independent learning. Researchers have explored and found a number of benefits for language learners in online discussions. There have been several studies that compared online discussion and face-to-face discussion; however, the major issue for teachers to consider is which class learning goals are best supported by an online discussion list, and what support is needed by learners in order to participate in it effectively.
Teaching suggestions

Not requiring students to have Web skills

- Ensure that learners have adequate computer and language skills to access the website and software tools before setting up online discussion tasks; when students are comfortable using the software functions, they can focus more clearly on the discussion and learning tasks.

- Consider the teacher’s role in discussion tasks and the demands it may make on the teacher’s time. Well-designed learning tasks provide good interaction experiences for students without demanding that teachers respond to every student message.

- Discuss with students the purpose of public discussion sites: Who might read and post messages? How often might people contribute, and why? Demonstrate some sites so that students can test their assumptions.

- Log onto an online news site and have students note the topics and themes of current news articles; invite students to predict and list keywords or phrases from the news topics that might appear in message postings on the site.

- Display on the data projector an online discussion forum on a news website; have students identify messages related to news articles by scanning the threads; explore the pattern of threads, and which topics attracted most interest from contributors.

- Have students scan threads and subject lines for familiar vocabulary, themes and topics, and then predict the attitudes and views they might find in messages.

- Have students scan a sample of message postings to find similar and different opinions on one topic.

- Display several messages in one topic thread; discuss the attitudes and opinions in the discussion and how they are realised through language.

- Have students summarise different points of view in postings on a topic.

- Help learners identify the language strategies and elements used to express opinion, agreement and disagreement, and topic-changing.

- Help students identify incidences of turn-taking in the messages and the language elements used to achieve it.

- Have students, in pairs, discuss face-to-face an article, movie or other topic; have them reflect on the body language and other non-linguistic strategies they used to express opinions, and how these might be translated to an online discussion.

- Have students identify vocabulary and phrases used to convey emotion or affect.

- Choose a selection of discussion list messages that use symbols to convey feelings and emotions; discuss the ways they are used and how they might be informed by cultural values, communication styles or conventions.

Requiring students to have Web skills

- Have students work in small groups and summarise their discussion; this reduces the load of posted messages for teacher and students to read.

- Create a discussion structure that genuinely hands ownership to the students; allow them to take responsibility for the discussion and task outcomes; only intervene if they request it or if you perceive problems.

- Demonstrate the drafting and editing tools that allow students to ‘undo’ errors, or make changes to their messages on the class discussion site; demonstrate how to post messages to threads; allow students time to practise and encourage them to check that their messages appear as intended.

- Show students how to delete messages, and allow them to practise this feature.

- Show students how to remedy posting errors and malfunctions.

- Set small class discussion tasks where individuals or groups have responsibility for ensuring the participation of all members; review the outcomes, and discuss strategies for encouraging and monitoring discussion and supporting each other’s contributions.

- Ensure that the class understands the purpose and methodology of the online forums.
• Have the class log onto a public discussion forum; discuss the issues and seek a range of viewpoints; draft a class response to be posted to the site, or help learners draft individual responses; encourage them to post their messages to the discussion site, and watch for responses over the next few days.

• Use online discussions as a regular classroom activity; use a video, news article or other stimulus for students to respond to; students will develop both language and online communication skills.

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**Lesson plans**

**Lesson not requiring students to have Web skills**

**Objective:** Students will be able to describe differences between face-to-face and online discussions.

**Materials:** Audiotape recorder.

**Procedure:**
- Assign a spoken communication task that requires a negotiated outcome to groups of three students.
- Have students complete the communication task while sitting back to back, taking turns to speak.
- Have the class then discuss the constraints on the discussion caused by the lack of visual cues and body language.
- Discuss discourse and language strategies that could be used to overcome the lack of visual cues.

**Extension:**
- Record and transcribe one or two of the student conversations; draw students' attention to the features of spoken language, such as ellipsis and use of reference; discuss the ways written discussion might vary.
Lesson not requiring students to have Web skills

Objective: Students will become familiar with the structure and features of asynchronous discussion forums.

Materials: Audiotape and videotape players, Post-it notes, clipboard.

Procedure:
• Have students view a video, hear an audio presentation or read an article on a topic within their cultural, social and linguistic range.
• Have students prepare a short written message in which they comment on the topic.
• Have students post their messages on the whiteboard.
• Have students read each listed message, prepare a written response to one or two of their own choice, then post their response alongside the original messages.
• Have students read responses next to their own messages and write a short reply.
• Continue the activity until all students have posted their own messages and at least one response to another.
• Analyse with the class the pattern of messages, the number of responses to individual messages and the messages that have the most replies.
• Discuss the asynchronous nature of the communication, and its role in social and educational communication.
• This activity can also be done using Post-it notes on a clipboard.

Extension:
• Isolate the longest ‘thread’ of messages and replies.
• Discuss one aspect or feature of the discussion (for example, the incidence of turn-taking in the discussion, levels of formality or informality, or other features that you plan to cover in instruction).

Lesson requiring students to have Web skills

Objective: Students will develop skills in using software tools for asynchronous online discussion forums.

Materials: Data projector, networked computers, instructional software such as WebCT.

Procedure:
• Demonstrate the login and entry procedures for the software platform being used (for example, WebCT, Blackboard Web Board), using a computer screen image projected to a large screen.
• Demonstrate the features of the discussion site that students are to use.
• Demonstrate how to create a new discussion thread; draft and post a message with subject line to the thread.
• Have selected students post messages with appropriate subject lines to the thread.
• Have selected students create new threads, using the teacher’s computer so that all can view the procedure and contribute their suggestions.
• Assign students a list of messages to post to the threads; have students read messages to decide which threads they should be posted to.
• View each thread with the class. If there have been no errors, each thread should have a list of identical messages, all with the same subject line.
• Demonstrate how to remove messages that are in the wrong thread and resubmit them to the correct thread.
• Have students practise the procedure for removing and reposting messages.

Extension:
• Start a thread with a message that invites comment and discussion; have students take turns to reply to it, and to each other’s comments. Younger learners may enjoy competing to see who can write the most messages with relevant content and comment.
Lesson requiring students to have Web skills

**Objective:** Students will practise communication strategies for asynchronous online discussion forums.

**Materials:** Networked computers.

**Procedure:**
- Choose an online discussion forum with messages that model the language and discourse strategies being taught (for example, opening statements, expressing opinions, polite agreement or disagreement, indicating humour, feelings and emotions).
- Have the class log onto the forum and identify the messages that demonstrate the strategy being learned.
- Select up to six messages for closer analysis with students.
- Analyse and discuss the incidence of the strategy and the ways it is realised through its linguistic elements.
- Create a discussion thread for three or four of the messages and start a discussion with a comment on aspects of the message; model the strategy or language feature being learned.
- Have students post a message to their choice of two threads, using the modelled communication strategies to respond to the contents of the message; reply to the teacher’s comments or reply to each other’s messages; have students use the strategy being learned, but vary the language in some ways.
- Post a summary of the student comments in each thread, using another version of the discourse feature being learned.

**Extension:**
- Have students vary the language being used for the discourse strategy post so that it is expressed differently in each message.

Lesson requiring students to have Web skills

**Objective:** Students use an asynchronous online discussion forum to collaborate in group projects.

**Materials:** Networked computers, discussion list software.

**Procedure:**
- Set up the discussion forum that allows students to communicate within small groups.
- Hold a class discussion on the aims of the project, the language learning goals, steps and stages, and the role of the online discussion in achieving project goals.
- Discuss with students the expected frequency and duration of communications, assessment criteria and expectations for learner and teacher roles.
- Have students grouped for small, manageable discussions.
- Introduce a task in which students must collaborate to prepare a group presentation. The presentation may be on the information that the group has gathered and summarised, their views on an issue, their plans for a class project, or another topic related to their classroom work. All discussion about the structure and planning for their presentation must be undertaken online.
- Have students post messages to suggest group plans and processes, and prepare their presentation.
- Have groups submit their presentation in an online format at the end of the defined discussion period.
- Have students and teacher read each group presentation.
- Comment on each presentation.
- Have students make one positive evaluation comment on a presentation of their choice. Groups read the comments on their presentation and reply if required or appropriate.

**Extension:**
- Discuss the online collaboration experience in an open face-to-face discussion, exploring issues such as communication, language and collaboration difficulties.
- Have students write a report of the collaboration experience and email it to the teacher.
Issues to explore

Issue  What discourse strategies help students achieve successful communication in asynchronous online discussion?

Exploration – action research

• Demonstrate selected messages from a public online discussion.
• Ask students to identify introductory, closing, referencing, topic-changing or other discourse strategies in the messages.
• Take notes on the strategies that students can identify and those that need to be pointed out to them.
• Isolate one or two strategies that seem unfamiliar to students, explain their purpose and use, and discuss how the same effect could be achieved in a spoken interaction.
• Ask students to focus on using this or a similar strategy in their next online discussion.
• Monitor the extent that students use this strategy in their next planned discussion forum.
• Track students’ use of the strategy over a number of discussions to see if they persist in using it, modify it or change to a different approach.
• Interview a selection of students about their use of the strategy and what effect they perceived it to have in their communications.
• Reteach (in a different way) a discourse feature that individual students misuse or omit, and monitor their use again.
• Decide how to assess student learning of the strategy.

Issue  Successful online collaboration

Online collaboration requires students to consider how to plan projects, share tasks and communicate clearly. Teachers can help them to develop these skills while improving their knowledge and skills of the language being learned.

Exploration – questions to think about

• Think about your current class of learners. What experience do they have in collaborating in real-time contexts? What kinds of activities would scaffold their development of these skills?
• What constraints does the online environment place on collaboration and communication for language learners? How can you explore this question further to inform your teaching and learning plan for online projects?

## Glossary of computer terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>address book</td>
<td>list of people’s userids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>append</td>
<td>include a previous email attached to the current one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attachment</td>
<td>a document sent along with an email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>banner</td>
<td>a graphic image on a website, usually for advertising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chat</td>
<td>synchronous written communication between people who are logged onto computers that are networked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chatroom</td>
<td>a written, synchronous interactive discussion on the Internet on a specific topic; everyone with access to the chatroom can read messages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clip art</td>
<td>computerised art or graphics available online to be imported into a document</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>computer-mediated communication (CMC)</td>
<td>communication between people using computer networks; CMC includes email, chat, instant messaging and discussion lists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>computer network</td>
<td>computers linked together so that files and messages can be sent from one to the other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discussion list</td>
<td>asynchronous communication where many people 'post' messages to be read by everyone with access to the discussion list</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>data projector</td>
<td>an electronic projector for displaying images from computers onto a screen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>email</td>
<td>written messages sent asynchronously across a computer network; email can be sent to one or many people if you know their email addresses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>email account</td>
<td>a personal account for sending email; email accounts can be with an email client, either through a standalone client or an Internet service provider</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glossary Term</td>
<td>Definition</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>email address</strong></td>
<td>an address for people to send your email to; includes userid and the server you are using to connect you to the network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>emoticons</strong></td>
<td>typed symbols used to represent emotions (for example, :&gt; for a happy face or joke)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>file</strong></td>
<td>a computer document with a name (given by the writer); a set of data stored on a computer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>flame(ing)</strong></td>
<td>strong, negative, emotional language used in online communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>folder</strong></td>
<td>space on a computer for storing files on a similar topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>hyperlink</strong></td>
<td>a way to link text or other information in a Web-like, rather than a linear, manner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>icon</strong></td>
<td>an image that represents a concept (for example, a closed envelope to represent an unread email message)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>inbox</strong></td>
<td>a destination for received emails</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>instant messaging (IM)</strong></td>
<td>synchronous communication on a network, only sent to the specific recipients</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Internet</strong></td>
<td>a network of computer networks that links computers around the world; often abbreviated to ‘Net’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ISP</strong></td>
<td>Internet service provider; a company that provides (for a fee) access to the Internet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>junk mail</strong></td>
<td>unsolicited email, usually for advertising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>keypal</strong></td>
<td>a penpal, except that the communication is via the Internet, rather than traditional mail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>listserv</strong></td>
<td>software that provides a forum or discussion for subscribers using email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>login</strong></td>
<td>a protocol used for opening an email account or a computer that is connected to a network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>login id</strong></td>
<td>the name that identifies a user on a computer or network; this can be the user’s actual name or a pseudonym</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MUD</strong></td>
<td>Multi-user dungeon; an interactive virtual game played on the Internet by several people at the same time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MOO</strong></td>
<td>Multi-object-oriented MUDs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>navigate</strong></td>
<td>to find a route through hyperlinks and commands or other online pointers in software or on the Web</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>netiquette</strong></td>
<td>etiquette on the Internet – that is, rules of behaviour for online communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>offline</strong></td>
<td>working without a computer or with a computer that is not currently connected live to a network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>online</strong></td>
<td>working on a computer that is actively connected to a network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>password</strong></td>
<td>private identification for a computer system to identify a person; a userid is also needed; the password is to protect people’s information and should not be shared with anyone else</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>point-and-click</strong></td>
<td>using a mouse to find (point) to an item on a computer screen and then click the mouse to either open the file or open a menu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>pop-up</strong></td>
<td>a graphic or text in a small window that jumps off the screen to attract attention; often used for advertising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>post</strong></td>
<td>to write a contribution to a discussion list</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>pull-down menu</strong></td>
<td>a menu of choices that can be found by clicking a computer mouse over a header on a computer screen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>redline</strong></td>
<td>marking a document by using the track changes feature; the track changes feature lines through deleted words/phrases in a color (not necessarily red) and additions are displayed in color</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>server</strong></td>
<td>a computer that links one computer to another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>snail mail</strong></td>
<td>regular paper mail</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Below is a list of readings referred to in the text or references for further reading on the topic. In addition, teachers can find an extensive listing of ESL/TESOL websites where they can locate additional activities or keypal suggestions at the NCELTR Resource Centre: 
http://www.nceltr.mq.edu.au/eslsites.html

**Series introduction**


**Introduction**


**Chapter 1**


**Chapter 2**


### Chapter 3


### Chapter 4


### Chapter 5


### Chapter 6


Chapter 7


Chapter 8


Note: Unpublished AMEP Research Centre reports are available from the NCELTR Resource Centre, Macquarie University: http://www.nceltr.mq.edu.au/resources/