

## 英会話授業でインターネットを使う

### Using the Internet in the English Conversation Class

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**Abstract:** *The Internet has fast become a versatile resource for teaching and promoting student learning. It is only natural that it is increasingly used for language learning as new applications are continually developed. It is relatively easy to imagine how the Internet can be applied to the teaching of reading, writing, grammar, and more recently listening skills due to advancements made in good quality speech production. However, effectively integrating the vast resources of the Internet into the conversation class has been less successful due to the inherently passive nature and invariably one-way interaction with a computer. This paper presents a practical method for effectively incorporating the Internet into the English language conversation class. Lessons, worksheets, forms and other information are available at the following site: <http://aitech.ac.jp/~offner/travelesson/TPindex.html>.*

#### 1.0 Introduction

Careful thought and preparation is required to effectively use the Internet in the foreign language conversation class. It is tempting to try out new technology and have students go online as a way to bring a fresh approach to traditional practices. However, simply having students search the Internet will not necessarily help their conversational ability. The challenge is to construct activities and exercises that require the student to use and further develop conversational skills. Taking advantage of the resources on the Internet for conversation class requires careful preparation. One highly effective method, proposed in this paper, relies on the construction of activities and exercises that necessitate student-to-student interaction derived from Internet research or information gathering.

#### 2.0 Basis Of The Worksheets

The construction of worksheets that use the Internet as an information resource culminating in activities with built-in conflicts that require students to orally interact with one another to solve a problem or arrive at some kind of consensus is central to the success of these lessons. There are many advantages to this system, and most importantly it cannot be duplicated, as of yet, in any other form. Providing students with access to the Internet brings the real world with up-to-date information infused with culture into the classroom. The carefully constructed worksheet provides students with the freedom to choose any relevant information found on the Internet while at the same time guiding them towards a common finished product that can be used for realistic oral interaction with other students. It is important that each student be provided with a printed copy of the

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worksheet to fill in to prevent the potential loss of information saved on computers and to provide easy access to refer to during later discussions. Furthermore, the process of filling in the worksheet serves to keep the students focused on task and helps them to think more seriously about their choices.

### **3.0 Features Of The Worksheets**

The worksheets need to be organized and laid out on the page in an easily understood form. A good worksheet contains three key features: presentation of a hypothetical situation, the questions with answer blanks or charts provided to fill in the pertinent information, and a presentation of the final speaking activity so students know exactly what they need to do.

#### **3.1 The Hypothetical Situation**

The foundation for the activities must be clearly stated so students can apply their original thinking to the same central theme. The worksheets, therefore, begin by succinctly laying out a hypothetical, but realistic situation. It is important to maintain a balance in the information provided as too much detail limits the students' freedom of choice while leaving things too general can result in end products that are too different to provide common grounds for discussion. Any situation that is suited to the class' interests will do, but generally it is best to limit situations to the not-too-distant future. Rather than posing "what if" or "what would you do if" type of improbable futuristic situations, it is best to limit the situations to something more immediate, something that students could realistically encounter or do within that year.

#### **3.2 The Questions**

The worksheet questions should help students think clearly, deeply, and realistically about the hypothetical situation. This is to prepare them for the activities that follow. Since these activities will require the students

to answer questions and explain their choices, the worksheet questions must ask students to search for information that will help them answer questions posed by other students. The worksheet questions must also help students organize their thoughts so they can easily and simply explain their choices. The questions must be constructed to steer students toward a common finished format that can be used when interacting with one another. At the same time, the questions should be open-ended enough to allow students to make original choices resulting in an end product that reflects their individuality. Since the main purpose of the questions on the worksheet is to guide students toward the final speaking activities, they should be limited in number and fairly easy to answer. Too much time spent on the questions will detract from both the time and effectiveness of the final activities.

#### **3.3 The Speaking Activities**

The worksheet ends in activities that require the students to talk about the original information on their worksheets. These activities can take many forms, but the key is to design activities that require students to actively work together to produce something that is a combination of their original choices. In other words, students should not be able to complete the activities on their own. Either they need to request information from their partner, or group, or they are required to use a specified number of choices from both their partner's worksheet as well as their own. The amount of free and spontaneous conversation the students will be able to produce will necessarily be restricted by their conversational ability. Advanced students will be able to give reasons for their choices and carry on lively discussions to complete the activities. Students at a very low level will obviously find this type of lesson much more challenging, but none-the-less interesting. Students at a low level can benefit from these types of lessons as the teacher helps them with their Internet searches



(possibly by recommending the best sites) and then providing sample dialogs that students can follow but at the same time make real by substituting pertinent information with their own original choices.

#### 4.0 Merits

There are inherent merits to this type of class lesson that cannot be achieved with traditional teaching materials. The Internet is the real world easily brought into the classroom and, combined with freedom of choice, allows each student to impart his or her unique personality as choices are made. This is a fundamental change from providing students with limited information typically found in a text or teacher provided material. This ownership of the material leads to a commitment that compels students to interact with others as they attempt to explain, defend, and advocate their ideas and choices as produced on the worksheet. In this way, students are highly motivated to engage their partner or group in conversations that are very real and stimulating as they are not dictated by the teacher or classroom text but come from within by being student produced.

#### 5.0 Practical Application

These lessons can be conducted in two basic ways. One method requires the use of a computer lab, the other is to assign the worksheet for homework. Conducting the class in a computer lab allows the teacher better control over the lesson and can provide better individual tutoring of students where the class consists of students of different levels. Giving the Internet search portion as a homework assignment is best for advanced students and it allows for much more time to be spent on the final speaking activity. Students may go on to form groups and continue the exercise as they gain confidence in their negotiations and discussions.

#### 5.1 Computer Lab Lessons

The lesson can be conducted in a computer lab with each student seated in front of a computer to do his or her individual research. The worksheet is distributed and students search for and select information found on the Internet to fill in the worksheet. If the students are relatively new to the Internet, and class is held in a computer lab with a teacher console, the teacher can help students in their search for information by posting sites, or pages from sites, that contain the most relevant information on the main screen to guide the class in the right direction. Also, if students become confused about their location within a site, the teacher can put up a base home page on the main screen for them to go back to and reorient themselves. If the computer lab does not have a main screen, the teacher can circulate as the students work and help those who are having difficulty while providing oral instructions to the class as a whole. In this way, student progress can be monitored and moved along ensuring that the students keep pace and are adequately prepared with enough time remaining to complete the final speaking activities.

#### 5.2 Homework Assignment

The other method in which to conduct the lesson is to give the worksheet to students for homework. They should come to the next class with the worksheet completed and fully prepared to participate in the oral activities while referring back to their worksheets for information and ideas. Since much more time can be spent on the speaking activities, it is a good practice to have students circulate and carry out a variety of activities with other pairs and groups as they learn from others and gain confidence in their discussions. Students must be fairly advanced both in language ability and Internet use for this method to succeed.

## 6.0 The Successful Lesson

It is necessary to follow a few simple rules to ensure a successful lesson. Most obviously, the worksheet should be suited to the class' level of English and interest in subject matter. To further the purposes of these lessons, it is better that the worksheets be too easy than too difficult. The layout of the worksheet should be simple, easy to complete, and not too long. The teacher must carefully think through the activities and anticipate the type of questions and discussions that will take place. The teacher can then construct a worksheet that requires the students to answer questions and search for information that will be helpful to them in their ensuing conversations with one another. Also, the teacher should search the Internet to make sure information required to answer the questions can be easily accessed on sites that are straightforward without having to wade through a maze of irrelevant pages. As an option, the teacher can note the most useful sites and recommended them to the students.

### 6.1 Providing help

To ensure that the students are able to complete the worksheets and engage in the final speaking activities, it is a good idea to provide links for students to go to for help. One way to incorporate this help function is to provide a question help page by making the questions "clickable" so that those students who need help can click on a question taking them to a link that explains where to go in more detail to gather the requested information and/or provides them with a picture example of how to fill in the form. Another helpful link is to provide a vocabulary page where students go to look up meanings of new words or an explanation of cultural meanings imbedded in certain terms or expressions. If the words are on the worksheet, they could be highlighted and clickable for students to easily find out more about them. Finally, a

sample dialog page with examples of typical questions and responses is especially useful for students at a lower level as they can refer to this page to help them with their negotiations in the final speaking activities.

## 7.0 Three "Travel Lesson" Examples

The following three examples use a trip for the hypothetical situation. This situation is the most generic in that it is suitable for most any class because of the almost universal interest in traveling. The examples are characterized by the different levels of English ability needed for the students to successfully complete the lessons.

### 7.1 A Trip To Disneyland

This first example has a single day trip to Disneyland, U.S.A. as the setting. Since this requires students to search only one website, it is easy and takes the least time making it suitable for lower level students. This site also provides an on-line planner that is useful in helping the students to organize their selections of things to do, places to eat, places to shop, shows to see, etc. in an easily accessible format. The question numbers on the Disney worksheet are clickable providing students with more detail about where to go to search for information to make their choices and complete the worksheet. In the end students must pair up and decide on a plan for the day that uses choices from both worksheets and satisfies both students. Students are also provided with sample conversations that they can use as a model or template where they can substitute their own information to help in their discussions with one another.

### 7.2 A Trip To Hawaii

This hypothetical situation requires more extensive web searching and is therefore better for students at the intermediate to advanced level. The worksheet can also be done for homework. In this example, students are informed that they will need to plan a 5-day trip to



Hawaii for their next summer vacation. The students fill out a more involved worksheet, finding information on such things as flights, hotels, restaurants, shopping, activities, etc. therefore requiring more extensive Internet searching than with the previous example. To get students to think more deeply and realistically about the trip, they are required to check the weather forecast for the days they will be in Hawaii as well. As in the previous example, students must combine elements from both worksheets into one mutually acceptable plan. Although the students are free to make their own choices, the worksheet provides a framework to ensure that each student's end product is in a form similar enough to further their discussions along without losing time establishing a foundation to begin from.

### **7.3 On Your Own**

The first part of this lesson, Internet search and filling out the worksheet, is assigned as homework and is suitable only for advanced students with ample Internet experience and a good command of English. The situation is presented as a one-week trip to a foreign English-speaking country that the student will take during their next school vacation. Similar to the previous example, students must decide what flight to take, what hotel to stay at, where they will eat, what sights they wish to see, and what they wish to do. A few web sites can be suggested to get the students started in their search for information and a schedule blank and conversation help is provided to show the students more specifically what is expected of them. Students must have thoroughly researched the information before coming to class. In the classroom, students spend their time in pair and/or group discussions combining elements of their own selections with that of other students. Since each student comes to class with their own unique plan or information, there is a strong motivation to present their views and to discuss with others.

## **8.0 Other Applications**

So far the examples have been limited to trips because they are the easiest to use and arguably incite the most interest due to of the almost universal attraction to travel. However, other settings can be used depending upon the level and make up of the class, and the final speaking activities may take a variety of forms.

### **8.1 Original Hypothetical Situations**

Creating a list of equipment to take camping, what to buy when shopping for a specific occasion or person, and what items should be selected for a specific party or event, are more possibilities for creating a unique hypothetical situation to base the worksheet and speaking activities on. The important thing to keep in mind is that the students be provided with clear and concise information to set up the situation, but at the same time allow the students to produce something that shows their individuality. This keeps interest and motivation high.

### **8.2 Original Speaking Activities**

The final speaking activities can take many forms. Besides negotiating to combine information, students could be instructed to categorize their choices according to a preset criterion provided by the teacher, or using something they come up with on their own. How to categorize the items and giving reasons will make up the bulk of the conversations and the activity could culminate by engaging the entire class in guessing either the criteria or categories and discussing the basis for them as each group reads out their lists.

### **8.3 Original Lessons**

The lesson can be expanded further and used as a writing assignment where the students take the information they have gathered and organize it into a "guide book" style of writing. Another possibility is to continue with the emphasis on oral communication and have pairs or groups organize their information into an oral presentation to the class.

## 9.0 Conclusion

The Internet will continue to grow and develop as it plays an increasingly important role in education. Until the day arrives when computers can virtually think and respond to the user in a more two-way application, the challenge will be how to incorporate this vital resource into playing an effective role in conversation classes. The method proposed in this paper represents a way to bring the very compelling resources of the Internet into the conversation class to

initiate lively and true-to-life student-to-student oral interaction. The Internet provides access to the real world outside the classroom. The worksheet provides the setting, focus of information, and activities. The freedom to make individual choices provides students with the motivation to use these assets in meaningful conversations.

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