

Some search engines offer an instant translation of a website from one language to another. An interesting option could be for children to use an online translator to find the English word for a term from their mother tongue.

Finally, the need to use the mother tongue will depend on the unique mix of task and website. The teacher must try and match the children's cognitive level with their language level as closely as possible. With this determined, they would use as much of the target language as possible and as little of the mother tongue as is necessary to carry out the task.

## Getting started

### What do you need?

#### Essentials

##### 1 A computer

The computer must have an operating system that can handle Internet services. Any recent version of Windows or Macintosh software is fine.

##### 2 A good colour monitor

If possible try and use a monitor large enough to display web pages clearly for groups of 4–6 children. The standard of monitors has improved greatly in recent years and it should be possible to find one with crisp colours and a fairly large screen (at least 17 inches) for a reasonable price.

##### 3 A connection to the Internet

Many schools now have central Internet access known as LANs (local area networks). If you do not have such a network, you will need to connect your computer to a network provider via a modem. A modem is a device that enables your computer to talk to a network via a telephone line. Modems can be very slow, and it is advisable, therefore, not to get one that operates under a speed of 56K. Modems can be external (connected to your computer) or built into the computer itself. Other options are high speed Internet via ISDN, DSL, or cable connections, and broadband. There will certainly be new developments in the coming years: put simply, choose the fastest connection available at your location.

##### 4 An Internet Service Provider

In order to connect to the Internet you must have an account with an Internet Service Provider (ISP). The company will charge you for time spent online, although increasingly service is being operated at a flat rate—for one price you can be online as long as you want. If you have a 'dial-up' service, in other words if you connect to your ISP via a telephone modem, you will also have to pay the costs of the telephone connection as well. Cable-based

systems do not have this additional cost. Your ISP will almost certainly provide you with connection software and probably automatically install a web browser (Internet Explorer or Netscape Navigator).

### 5 A printer

Your pupils will need printed ('hard') copies of their electronic documents to complete some of the tasks in this book. They will also want to print out any web content they have created. It is worth investing a bit of money in a printer. A printer should be fast and have a good resolution (600 dpi minimum). Laser printers create very professional looking documents, but printers with ink cartridges are also very good these days. You probably also may want to consider a colour printer, since the children will want to display their work in its full glory. Unfortunately, printing colour images can be quite time consuming unless you have a top-quality printer. It also takes a lot of ink. One solution is to have two printers: one black and white one for rough drafts, worksheets and straight text, and a colour printer for final products or if a colour picture is necessary in the task.

### 6 Software

Be sure to check that your 'office software'—the word-processing, spreadsheet and presentation software—is up to date and generally compatible with most computer systems. If you work with a Macintosh computer, most new software will interact easily with PC's, but older versions may not translate reliably. Most computers are delivered with 'software bundles' which include all of the above applications.

In order to create emails you must also have an email program. These are generally delivered with your computer, but you can choose from many options depending on the system you use.

If you want to create web pages, you will also need a web-editing program. These programs allow you to create web content much as you would design a page with a traditional office suite of applications. The program translates your content into HTML code, which makes knowledge of HTML unnecessary. Today, many of the office software suites include web-editing capabilities into their word-processing applications and some web browsers allow you to compose content for the Internet as well.

You will find that many additional programs needed to work with the Internet are available free online. These mini-programs are known as 'plug-ins'. Plug-ins allow you, for instance, to listen to audio, play videos and animations, or to read certain text documents. New web browsers increasingly include many plug-ins in their core package. Your computer will prompt you if it needs something the browser does not supply.

### Optional but useful

#### 1 A scanner

A scanner is an incredibly useful tool for your classroom. Working much like a photocopier, a scanner reads an image and converts it into an electronic document that you can manipulate and place on a web page. This allows you to present student work (photographs, artwork and so on) and can eliminate the need for a digital camera. When buying a scanner you should pay attention to resolution. As with printers, you will need a minimum of 600 dpi.

#### 2 A digital camera

Although a scanner can provide you with the images you need, some originals may not be that simple to scan; results may appear muddled or unclear. Having a digital camera eliminates this problem. Digital cameras also allow for immediate viewing and deletion of photographs without using up expensive film. Thus experimenting with different options becomes less cost intensive. Be sure that your digital camera has high enough resolution to produce pictures that look good on paper as well as on screen. It is also advisable to have an LCD display on the camera for children to view the photographs they take. Another important consideration is the format in which the camera saves images. If possible, get a camera that can save images as jpeg, tiff or gif files; these are the common ones.

#### 3 A computer projector

Connecting your computer to a projector allows you to display what is on your computer monitor on to a large screen in much the same one would present a slide show. Projectors are rather expensive and an alternative is to connect your computer to a large television. Most recent television models allow for such connections.

### The Internet classroom environment

Clearly, one of the major impediments to working with the Internet is the lack of a sufficient number of computers. In fact, many of us will be working in a one-computer environment. While this limits our options, it does not rule out integrating the Internet into our classrooms. Here are some things to consider:

- 1 Connect your computer to a projector or television screen so the whole class can view the screen and what is going on. (See the paragraph above.) This is also a very good idea in a multiple-computer environment since it allows you to explain key concepts to the entire class before breaking up into project teams. Children can also use the projector/television option to present the results of their work.
- 2 Most of the activities in this book have steps that can be done offline either in preparation or in summation. In planning, be sure to consider both *pre-computer* and *post-computer* work.

In many schools, access to computers is limited and children will need to be well prepared to make the most of the short time they will have online. Where computers are in short supply, instead of breaking up the class into small self-contained groups working parallel to each other, you can work with the whole class and assign different steps of an activity to individual groups—one of the steps being at the computer.

- 3 If you have a multi-age or mixed-ability classroom, you can assign computer work to one group of children while you focus directly on another, thus allowing for differentiated instruction. The computer becomes a workstation.
- 4 If all else fails, you can always create a hard-copy version of many of the activities in this book. In this scenario, you can:
  - conduct searches on your own and distribute printouts of relevant web pages to your pupils
  - collect email messages and post them for your pupils and print out replies they receive
  - collect any text, art or formatting of web pages and upload it to a website yourself. You can then either display the results via a projector or print out the web pages for the children.
- 5 Whether you have one computer or many in your classroom, set up a computer corner. Make it a pleasant light environment and keep it tidy and clean. This could be a task for your pupils. As you teach the language of computers and the Internet, you may want to create instructional posters to hang up in the computer corner, with tips and definitions. You can also do this in a language lab.

## A model for using the Internet

### Learning purposes

The first step in harnessing the Internet for classroom use is to clearly define its applications. In the young learners' environment we can break this down into three distinct areas:

- pure communication
- searching for information
- producing content for the Internet.

### **Pure communication**

This relates to the use of email or chat programs. Using email is much like writing a normal letter, but its immediate delivery is a great motivator. Working with email is an asynchronous task—that is to say, the communication is not immediate as in a face-to-face conversation or a telephone call. It allows children time to formulate ideas, yet once they have written their response they can send it immediately. Synchronous tasks such as 'chats' occur in real-time, which means that the participants must all be online at

the same time. This is obviously difficult if the chat involves people from across the world and different time zones. The dangers of chats have already been mentioned. Chats also require quick responses from learners if they are to be effective. This is a real challenge for young learners who are just beginning to learn a language; they generally need time to reflect before responding in the target language. Of course, children can take their time in responding, but then email would seem more appropriate since answers can be formulated offline and then sent. This saves money and class time. (Children can even formulate email responses as homework assignments.)

Email is fully integrated into many websites and learners do not even have to open a web browser. It can carry any number of information formats through the attachment feature. One of the great features of email is its ability to send one letter to multiple addresses. Thus, with a click of the mouse, one core activity is duplicated for the entire class. There is no end to the possibilities of what content you can introduce in these activities.

Because of its simplicity, working with email seems a good place to start. Section 2 of this book presents some very basic activities that use email.

### **Searching for information**

The next step up from pure communication is searching for information. This normally requires the use of a web browser. At the beginning you may choose to give the children a list of pre-selected web addresses (URLs) to choose from. This will eliminate the need to operate the web browser and it will help narrow the focus of a child's exploration. Once the children are comfortable in the website environment, you can introduce them to search engines. There are many search engines geared exclusively to children. See 'Search engines: children-specific' in section 7, page 110, for a list of some good examples.

We have created a website to accompany this book, which can be accessed via the Resource Books for Teachers series website at <http://www.oup.com/elt/teacher/rbt>. Here you will find a list of regularly-updated links.

### **Producing content**

Once the children feel confident in the web environment it is a small step to get them to begin producing their own content. In a sense they will have already done this when working with email. Now, however, they have the chance to enhance their work with all the exciting multimedia options the web has to offer (and which you are prepared to research and understand). Fortunately, basic web authoring has become quite easy through automated programs; there is no need to learn the programming language most commonly used to create web pages, HTML.

A logical bridge between searching for information and creating content is the creation of a class website. A class website can be used to practise web basics in a controlled environment. It can integrate email, and searchable web addresses can be set up as links instead of handouts. The class website can be the jump-off point for all other activities on the net, be they searches, e-contacts, projects or anything else. In a sense, the class homepage can be a multi-faceted portfolio of class work over the course of the year. It can, of course, contain the portfolios of individual children as well. See section 5, 'Electronic portfolios' and the book's website for an example.

Of course childrens' portfolios are very personal documents and not every child will feel comfortable letting anybody read them. It may therefore be advisable to limit access to these personal portfolios by adding password protection to the web pages. Most web editors allow you to define user groups and privileges, and to assign passwords. See the manual for your specific web-editing application for more details.

For more on producing content, see the sections on 'Working with e-groups and discussion lists' (page 18) and 'Weblogs' (page 19).

### Preparing children for the Internet task

If your children are familiar with basic computing and web navigation, they will still need to be introduced to the specific activity you have chosen for them. In other words, you have to explain to them what you want them to do. As with any other classroom activity, the underlying task must be conceptually appropriate for the age group. Have the children learned basic research skills? Can they classify objects or recognize patterns? Can they follow directions with a series of steps? Do they have knowledge of the world, countries and customs? Can they organize their ideas in a logical order? Do they understand basic measurement concepts?

To try and answer these questions for each target age group would go well beyond the scope of this book. Deciding on an age recommendation was the most difficult part of writing the activities. Are the language needs over the head of the children or is the task itself too challenging? Sometimes it is hard to keep the two apart. In writing this book, I have tended towards challenging learners in the belief that if children can perform a task type in their mother tongue, they have the potential to do the same in the target language, provided the content they are working with is geared to their language level. As with anything new, children will need time to adjust to the Internet and to the tasks at hand.

#### **Be patient**

Children will need a lot of support at the outset, but the experience they get in one website activity is often transferable to another. It

gets easier with time. With growing confidence in manipulating the Internet itself, children will be able to focus more on the language of the task.

Many problems that arise in working with the Internet can be avoided by a careful selection of websites for the task. Let's face it, this can be fairly time-consuming. Moreover, websites frequently disappear so the process of selection has to be an ongoing one. Also, you may want to customize your site selection to appeal more directly to the needs of your students. See the sections on selecting websites and creating web directories below.

### **Be explicit**

As in most language learning activities, the more explicit you are in your instructions, the easier it will be for children to understand the task. Don't let them wander aimlessly around on a website. Guide them to the information. Limit options. Be specific in your links. Don't simply log on to a general homepage of a site if you can direct the children to the exact page they need. Older children may be capable of more open-ended searches, but children of 8–10 may well find it difficult to navigate through large sites.

### **Isolate the task**

Some websites are full of confusing information. Currency converter sites, for example, are often packed with links to financial services. This needn't inhibit us as long as we can direct the children to the currency converter itself, which they can easily manipulate. As the Internet becomes more commercial you and the children may be confronted with a disturbing array of advertisements in the form of blinking sidebars and annoying 'pop-ups', new windows which appear when you access a site. You must teach the children to ignore these nuisances and focus on the specific task at hand.

## **Introducing topic and task**

Before you go online with the children you need to take some time to introduce the topic you will be working on. Here are some suggested steps:

### **Pre-computer**

- Introduce the title of the Internet task and ask the children to *predict* what it might be about.
- Ask them what they already know about the subject. Write down their ideas on the board.
- Introduce new vocabulary or review previous knowledge as it relates to the upcoming task.

### **Orientation**

- Log on to the selected website or hand the children screenshots of the web page.
- Ask the children to scan the page for keywords.

- Let them explore the page, looking for hotlinks.
- In groups, have the children try and make mind maps of the site.

### **Demonstration**

The easiest way for children to understand a task is to do it with them first. If you have a projector, they can follow your steps on screen. Otherwise provide them with a series of screenshots to refer to.

### **Circulate and help**

When the children are just starting on a new web activity, you will need to monitor their progress and provide support. They can help each other too. This is a strong argument for working in groups rather than at individual terminals. Internet tasks can strengthen cooperative learning skills. Monitor group work closely to ensure that each child gets a chance to use the keyboard and mouse. It is very easy for one child to dominate.

## Some practical issues

### Selecting websites

Here are a few criteria to help you choose sites for use with young learners. Remember to check each site thoroughly before making your decision.

#### **Look for simple sites with interesting graphics**

Too much text will scare off young language learners. Bright colours and interesting illustrations will catch their attention. However, too many ‘bells and whistles’ on a page (such as animation and sound) may confuse them.

#### **Look for sites that load quickly**

Not many teachers will have the benefit of a high speed Internet connection so loading times can be long—and nothing can kill an Internet language learning class and demotivate your children quicker than a slow-loading site. Again, look for simple sites without intricate plug-ins or elaborate audio and visual options.

#### **Look for sites with clear and easy navigation**

Once on a site, you want children to be able to get to the information as quickly and efficiently as possible. Simple homepages with a site map or guide are ideal for children. If possible, the navigation should be iconic—in other words, links should be in the form of pictures, with titles written underneath. In moving from page to page, it is advisable to observe a ‘two click rule’: after logging on to a website, it should not take you more than two clicks of the mouse to get to real content. In the case of the activities in this book, it means that as a rule of thumb, the answers or information should be no more than two clicks away.

**Be sure you know who is behind your site**

The Internet is not a controlled environment and there is always the potential that dishonest people will use a website as bait to lure people for their own ends. Some apparently innocent sites are actually fronts for religious or other organizations interested in collecting data on people visiting the homepage. You can avoid this by choosing sites managed by well-established organizations or those you are already familiar and comfortable with. You may want to check the appropriacy of the advertizing, too.

**Creating a web directory**

‘You never know where you’re going till you get there.’ This couldn’t be truer than when talking about the Internet. Altering one word in a search box can send you to a completely different place. Soon you find yourself in a totally unexpected corner of Cyberspace and if you don’t keep track of your steps, you may never be able to get back there again. For this reason it makes good sense to start building a web directory from the very start of your work with the Internet. This is extremely easy—a click of a menu item. If you are using Internet Explorer, you create a list of ‘Favourites’. If your browser is Netscape Navigator, the list will be called ‘Bookmarks’. These are two words for the same thing: the web addresses (URLs) of sites you have visited and that you may wish to visit again.

Bookmarks and Favourites can quickly and easily be organized into folders so that you can find them more easily. You can even ‘publish’ these collections of links on your school or class web page and thereby control and limit the ‘surfing’ your students do. Free programs available on the Internet can also combine all your Bookmarks or Favourites on to one ‘page’ for easier use.

Web browsers also offer you a built-in option to retrace your steps: the menu item ‘History’. This feature documents all of your movements on the www over a period of time. You can set the duration you desire (one day, two days, a week): with Internet Explorer, for example, this is done by clicking on ‘Tools’ then ‘Internet options’. While the History feature cannot sort links as Favourites or Bookmarks can, it is very valuable should your computer crash.

**Contacting partners**

If you plan to develop an e-partnership with another institution either abroad or locally, you must begin making contacts long before your class project starts. You will need to explain your project and place it on one of the many international databases or ‘listserves’ where like-minded educators post their own ideas or search for partners.

Once you establish initial contact you will need to discuss and agree upon the rules of your interaction and get a commitment on time frames for responses. There is nothing more frustrating for children than getting no answers to their emails. Therefore, be realistic. People have busy lives and communication tasks should be short and very focused.

See 'Finding partners' in section 7, page 110, and the book's website, for web addresses to contact partners.

## Creating questionnaires and worksheets

For many activities in this book there are templates for worksheets children can use to record information from their Internet searches. You can find these at the back of the book, and on the book's website as downloadable documents. In other cases, where the content is not specified, you will have to come up with the relevant questions. A good way to make such worksheets or forms is to use the Table function in an application like Microsoft Word. There is also a huge variety of activity generators available free on the web; these allow you to create games, quizzes and worksheets. This book's website has links to a few of them.

## Working with e-groups and discussion lists

One of the easiest ways to communicate on the Internet and share files is to create an 'e-group' or discussion list. Unlike creating a web page, which requires a fair amount of time and some basic familiarity with web tools, discussion groups have a built-in structure that you can immediately activate and start using. Unlike decentralized email that sends messages only to individual accounts, discussion lists group all postings in one place that all members of the list can access and read. This makes it easy for everybody to follow a discussion and contribute. Of course, it is also possible to have the messages on the central site sent to the individual email address as well.

One great function of e-groups is the ability to upload files to the list for every member to share. Thus, rather than creating web pages, your students could create Word documents or scan in pictures and place them as files on the group site. This might be easier for you and your students and it has the added advantage of allowing you to make content available on the web without having to find a host for your own site—a cheaper alternative for those with tight budgets.

When you create an e-group, you become a moderator and can set certain standards for the group. Some groups are very open and anyone can join. Others are more restrictive. As moderator you can set the parameters so that anyone wanting to join has to have your approval first. This is important when working with children. By keeping membership approval in your hands you can safeguard

against anyone prowling your site to make contact with your children for unethical purposes. Basically, you will be checking email addresses for their authenticity. If you can't reasonably trace an email address to an identifiable user or institution, don't allow them to join. When working with partner schools, you can ask your colleagues to pre-approve their students' email addresses for membership.

Many e-groups also come equipped with built-in chat software. If you have a closed group this can be a safe option for your children to test the waters of synchronous communication. In fact, they can choose to log on to the chat individually from home and simply check if anyone else is online.

Another function that is particularly fun to use with children is the polling option. This function allows you to ask the group certain questions and members can respond in multiple-choice style, making it easy for the children to answer.

Since e-groups are free, you can create as many as you want—one per project or topic—or you can choose to keep everything in one place and simply change the discussion from time to time.

The best sites I have found for creating e-groups are listed under 'E-groups' in section 7, page 110.

## Weblogs or 'blogs'

Recently many people have turned to 'blogs' as an alternative to traditional websites and discussion lists. Blogs are web diaries with built-in tools that allow users to publish information on the web in much the same way they use a text program. Unlike traditional websites, blogs are automatically updated each time a person publishes a new 'posting'. Thus, rather than you, the teacher, regularly needing to update a class website, any registered user with publishing privileges can immediately add to the site. This can obviously save you a lot of time. As moderator, you can easily determine who has publishing privileges by adjusting the blog settings. You can also, for instance, choose to view all postings before allowing them to be published on the blog—a good idea when working with young learners.

Weblogs can be private, or community-based. You can determine membership in a community group. You can create a class weblog where everyone (perhaps even parents) can contribute. You may in addition let each child set up and manage their own individual weblogs where only they can publish (subject to your approval). These private weblogs are very empowering for children. It gives them a real platform and control over what they want to say.

Since weblogs are organized chronologically, they have the potential to provide a clear record of a child's progress in English. In fact, they are a simple alternative to more elaborate portfolios (see section 5, 'Electronic portfolios', pages 101–104), involving at least basic design skills.

Unlike discussion list postings, blog postings can contain pictures, audio/video files and links in the body of the message. The only issue here is that you must have some place to store any images or audio you choose to integrate. They can either be displayed in the body of the message or simply shown as links. Most free blogging sites will only host text-based blogs, but you can link to images elsewhere on the web even though you cannot upload images or audio files to the free site.

For more information on blogs, see 'Weblogs' in section 7, page 112, and the book's website.

## Internet safety

As noted above, the Internet is a mirror of the real world and this includes potential dangers—not limited to the use of chat rooms. The content on the Internet is not screened by any central authority and thus it is possible that children can access material that is not appropriate for their age group (or any age group for that matter!). Similarly, the anonymity of the Internet means that communication via email has its risks.

The best approach to guaranteeing Internet safety is to keep a sharp eye out for what is going on in the classroom. It is unwise simply to allow the children to work freely online. As you will see below, the activities in this book are all designed to limit such random 'surfing', but you must actively monitor computer work.

Of course, you can't be everywhere at once. Using child-safe search engines will also help protect your children from inappropriate material. These search engines pre-select sites for their suitability for children. You will find a list of the most popular child-safe search engines under 'Search engines: children-specific' in section 7, page 111.

In addition to search engines, you can also limit random searching by using 'web filters'. Many online services and web browsers have built in 'parental controls' which scan websites and block access if they have questionable content. In addition to these built-in filters, you can also purchase more powerful web filters, which you can adjust to suit your individual needs. All of them are very easy to set up and use.

Email and chat rooms probably pose an even greater threat to children's security. Online predators have been known to establish contact with children and coax personal information from

them or arrange live meetings, which can be extremely dangerous. Take some time to establish a set of 'Internet rules' with your students, just as you establish rules for your classroom as a whole. Display the rules in the classroom prominently. Be clear how serious these rules are. Maybe ask your children to sign an *Internet Code of Conduct*.

Here are some of the key rules to follow:

- Never allow the children to divulge any private information such as address or telephone number.
- Monitor email and allow the children only to send email to addresses you have already approved (such as in school exchanges). Some Internet services will allow all emails sent by the children to be copied to the teacher's email account. See if your provider has this option.
- Do not allow children to open emails from an unknown source.
- If an unknown email arrives, the children must report it to the teacher.
- All material published by the children on the Internet must be approved by the teacher and the parents.

Many students also have Internet connections at home. It is a good idea to send the Internet rules to the parents to read and enforce. They may not be aware of the inherent dangers of online work.

## Viruses

Being connected to the www can expose your computer to viruses, aggressive computer programs that can destroy your data or erase your hard disk. Viruses come in all shapes and sizes and are often transported as attachments to emails. Be very careful when opening email attachments from unknown sources. You can set your email program to block certain messages or 'quarantine' them until you decide they are safe.

There are many anti-virus applications commercially available. These applications are being constantly updated, but malicious programmers are always one step ahead. Don't rely on anti-virus applications to protect you—be on your guard.

## Copyright issues

In principle, Internet content enjoys the same copyright protection as material available in more traditional forms such as books or videos. With all copyright works there is a general principle of 'fair use', though the principle is not clearly defined. What constitutes fair use will depend on the individual materials you and your students want to use and how you intend to use them.

In general, using copyright-protected material as part of an educational project is considered 'fair use'. The web creation activities in this book all fit this definition. In other words, it is all right for children to cut and paste images and other materials from websites as long as they adhere to certain limitations. These limitations differ from media to media (audio, video, text, etc.), but as a rule of thumb, you and your students should not copy more than 10 per cent of content without asking for permission. If you are copying entire sections of websites and using them in their original form, you may be breaking 'fair use' principles. These guidelines apply not only to student work, but to teacher websites and portfolios as well.

If you intend to use any of the copied material commercially, no matter what percentage of content, you must seek permission. If in doubt, always ask, before you get into legal difficulties.