

# languages ICT



## Technology for languages • Focus on email

Email offers highly motivating opportunities for pupils to explore topics of interest and find out about their peers, but careful organisation makes email projects successful. You must decide the timetable for correspondence, whether pupils will work individually or in teams, the topics to cover, the amount of target language to use and when, and the uses to which email will be put to develop or consolidate learning.

As with all on-line communication, careful consideration of security issues is necessary to ensure your duty of care for pupils. Refer to your school's Acceptable Use Policy and visit the DfES Superhighway Safety website at <http://safety.ngfl.gov.uk> for guidance.

### Getting to know each other

Beginners can exchange personal information, such as name, age, birthday, address, and personal description (physical characteristics and personality) with pupils in their partner school. The inclusion of pets and family will vary verb usage from first to third person. Teachers should agree prior to the project what should be covered in the emails. Some preparation may be necessary beforehand, including a mock email sent to the teacher. Digital photographs and short mp3 recordings can be attached to enrich the email content.

### Building a word bank

Teachers in partner schools can liaise to build a word bank of useful topic-specific words and phrases to support their pupils' email correspondence on a particular topic area. The two classes build the word bank in their mother tongue and the compilations are exchanged. Pupils then work with dictionaries to identify equivalents in their own language, with any queries or difficulties resolved by the teacher. The newly-created glossary is then placed on the network to be used by pupils to enrich their individual correspondence on the topic. For additional support, the new resource could be used to create interactive exercises with authoring software.

### Sharing and comparing experiences

The use of email can be combined with the use of spreadsheets to encourage pupils to analyse aspects of their lives for comparison with pupils in their partner school. For example, pupils can compare the ways in which they spend pocket money, using a spreadsheet to illustrate expenditure by the class (see Focus on spreadsheets under Technology for languages). Follow-on activities might include an oral presentation or a written report to demonstrate findings.

### International research

It can be very interesting to gather the same information from children in a number of different countries. It may be possible to set up a three- or four-way school exchange where pupils in all countries are learning the same language, but some teacher mediation is required to ensure adequate quality of target language use. Another option is for you to send a one-off request 'cold' to a number of schools throughout the world, identified via the Internet. For example, you may write to 10+ schools in Spain, Gran Canaria, Argentina, Peru and Mexico to ask what pupils' favourite food and drink are, in the hope that three or four will send a reply.

### Developing cultural awareness

Exploring the traditions and festivals of other countries develops cultural awareness and can interest pupils of all ages. Email can be used to exchange key statements in mother tongue, with photos, images and even a sound file of a relevant song attached. Pupils can then work in groups with these materials to create presentations in the target language containing text, image and sound. More advanced pupils can research the significance, history and development of particular festivals in their mother tongue and then collaborate with pupils in the partner school to identify target language for the theme. They could produce an e-exhibition in the target language, housed on the school website and linking to a similar page on the website of the partner school.

### Preparing for an exchange visit

Email can be used to prepare for a video conferencing session prior to exchange visits between partner schools. Pupils prepare information in mother tongue on their school, city and region. They work in teams on different areas of the topic, which might include famous locals, weather and the local accent or languages. The teams also read and process incoming information on their topic area, thus assembling a

useful body of relevant target language. Materials are then produced in the target language to be shared via the video conferencing session, such as a brochure, presentation or web page.

### **Web-based quests**

An interesting use of email is to participate in web-based activities which require some input or opinion, such as web quests or solving mysteries by following a series of clues. An example of this can be found at Polarfle ([www.polarfle.com](http://www.polarfle.com)), a French website where pupils can complete a set of exercises to help solve a crime (approx. Year 9 level). They then email their solution, naming the culprit and receive an email in response to say whether they were correct. See the Webwatch review on the Languages ICT website ([www.languages-ict.org.uk/webwatch\\_reviews/polarfle.htm](http://www.languages-ict.org.uk/webwatch_reviews/polarfle.htm)).

### **Researching the target language country**

Pupils can use email to seek information for a specific purpose. For example, pupils may be asked to research an area of the target language country for a real or imaginary local business. The business requires a short report on the region, focusing on similar businesses there, and other aspects such as transport links, amenities and climate. Pupils identify websites of suitable businesses and organisations in the region, such as the Chamber of Commerce. They send an email outlining their request for information, using the Contact Us section of the website, and information received is incorporated into their report.

### **Story-telling**

Pupils can work in teams to write instalments of a story, which they send via email to the partner school. Initially, they can work on a famous story such as Cinderella, using their mother tongue. Teachers should agree beforehand the length of each instalment and the level and range of language to be used. As the story progresses, each team reads and builds up a target language version of the story. Upon completion, teams can adapt the target language version they have received into a presentation, to which they add images and recordings of themselves voicing characters from the story. This process can be repeated for an imaginary story, but this time pupils work solely in the target language. The teams correct each other after each instalment, focusing on a maximum of 3 errors. Final products can then be exchanged by burning onto CD and sending by post or placing on the schools' websites.

### **Debating issues**

Exchanging emails on a topical issue allows pupils to develop language competence and share perspectives on matters of common interest. Themes such as traffic congestion, litter, school uniform, junk food or reality television could be used. Pupils work in teams to agreed headings within each theme, writing initially in mother tongue and amassing useful target language from incoming emails. At a given point in the project, each team switches to writing in the target language. Each team creates a final document, in which they make a set of recommendations in the target language. These can be shared between schools or placed on respective websites.

### **Cross-curricular projects**

Email and Internet research can be used to conduct a collaborative comparative study involving another curriculum area, such as the study of weather in Geography. Pupils can monitor the local weather forecast, record personal observations of conditions and visit websites such as BBC Weather ([www.bbc.co.uk/weather](http://www.bbc.co.uk/weather)) They do this for up to a fortnight, exchanging emails regularly with their partner group, explaining in mother tongue what the forecast was and what really happened. Using the data and appropriate target language gleaned from their partners, each group can produce a presentation analysing the weather in the foreign location, commenting on the accuracy of the forecasts and putting forward reasons for variations from the forecast.

To read about tried and tested ideas for using email, try searching the Useful ICT ideas, effective language lessons database on the Languages ICT website.