

languages ICT

Technology for languages

Focus on interactive whiteboard technology

Interactive whiteboards are increasingly common in the languages classroom. They enable a much more dynamic, and engaging way of working with the whole class. Electronic voting systems, electronic slates, wireless keyboards and remote mice make whole class teaching ever more flexible.

The unique benefits of the technology are particularly obvious when you consider the features offered by the integrated software particular to each whiteboard model, many of which are included here. Check your own board and software to find out which features are available to you.

Note that any software you have on your computer can be displayed and manipulated via your interactive whiteboard, so other downloads in this series including ideas for whole class teaching are relevant

Using interactive resources

If you have access to interactive quiz or game-style activities on CD-ROM, DVD or the school network, you can ask pupils to come to the front to click or drag items as required by the task. Software designed for whole class teaching use will probably display clickable items in the lower half of the screen so they can be reached easily. Be aware that some software publishers require you to purchase a licence for whole class teaching use. You will also find interactive exercises delivered via a website, but make sure that text and pictures on the website are large enough to be seen from the back of the classroom.

You can require a pupil at the board to justify the selection s/he makes and/or encourage the whole class to give suggestions, which s/he must select from. Rather than asking a different child to come to the board each time, pupils can take turns in being board controller, interacting with the board on behalf of the pupil answering the question.

Labelling, matching, sorting

Dragging text labels to match them to pictures is a good way of practising very new language, as it can give pupils a powerful visual image by which to remember. This activity can also be used for sorting vocabulary and phrases. For example, you could ask pupils to match a selection of nouns, adjectives and verbs to an image of the annual season they best reflect. Text can be typed or handwritten, which is useful for languages in non-Roman script not supported by software programs.

For suitable images, use ClipArt pictures or digital photos you have taken yourself. Some whiteboard software offers a library of images and background settings of its own. It is often possible to take a 'photo' of a selected area of your screen. This could be a shot of a CD-ROM activity, a video still, a digital photo or a web page.

‘Spotlight’ feature

A common software feature enables you to create a black layer covering your screen, except for a small circle of light. This circle reveals a partial glimpse of what is underneath, which could be words and/or images on a website, for example, or on a slide you have created. Young children can be encouraged to name any colours they can see, for example, and give suggestions for what might be hidden underneath the black layer. More advanced learners can be expected to use predictive language and to speculate on more complex scenes and contexts rather than individual items. You can move the circle around and/or re-size it to give more hints and to reveal answers.

Slow reveal

As you might gradually reveal the content of an OHT by moving an opaque piece of paper above it, you can slowly reveal what is on screen, whatever application you are using. For example, you might reveal the lines of a dialogue one by one, asking pupils to predict what the next line might be. Used from the side, pupils can predict what the next element of a sentence might be, a useful way to practise new grammar structures and word order.

Gap-fill activities

Paste or type your paragraph of text onto screen and use a thick white pen to create your gaps, by colouring over the words and phrases you want to omit. When pupils predict a missing word, they simply need to use the erase tool to ‘rub out’ the white layer over the word to find out if they are correct. This activity can be attempted as a vocabulary exercise or as a grammatical exercise as pupils have to predict the correct adjectival ending or verb ending.

Additionally, pupils could then listen to a sound file or video file of the text in order to solve the remaining gaps. It could be motivating to do such a text analysis on email communication from a partner school.

Re-ordering language

You can create a sentence whereby each word or phrase is generated as a separate component. Pupils can then drag and drop elements of a mixed-up sentence into their proper place. This could be particularly useful for practising complex sentence structures, such as those containing a ‘because’ clause. You could embed sound or video file into the slide, on which pupils could click to access a hint or to check an answer. The flexibility and visual nature of this exercise offers opportunities to discuss and correct wrong answers as they are tried out, resolving misunderstandings on the spot.

Brainstorming exercises

Brainstorming, perhaps using a spider diagram, to build up items of related language, can be used as a prelude to a reading or writing activity. Working on the whiteboard the notes and diagrams can easily be saved as a flipchart or notebook for reference in a subsequent lesson or with another class. A variation on the same idea, maybe with younger learners, is to build the brainstorming activity around images, clip art or digital photos, and related vocabulary or phrases. To take the same idea one step further, in a subsequent lesson a previous lesson’s brainstorming flipchart/notebook can be opened and then adapted into a continuous text telling a story, which can be saved as a separate flipchart or notebook for reference by teacher and pupils alike.

Using colours for grammatical or textual analysis

The highlight feature can be used to good effect with pupils of all ages to shade important

aspects of language in a colour that stands out on screen. This could be done to illustrate gender, adjectival endings, verb endings, subject pronouns and so on. With older more advanced groups pupils themselves could work in groups to highlight more complex grammatical features: the position of object pronouns, conjunctions which are followed by a subjunctive, instances of the passive voice and so on.

For textual analysis pupils could work in groups using colours to identify, for example, positive or negative statements, language that is exaggerated, sensational, or humorous. At a very practical level they could work together using colour to highlight new language which must be looked up, or useful phrases which could be adapted for their own use in an essay.

Multiple choice voting

A number of class voting systems now exist, all of which can be used alongside your interactive whiteboard. Class sets of handheld voting devices, such as those used in the game show 'Who wants to be a millionaire?', are used by pupils to select their response to multiple choice options displayed on screen or given by the teacher. You get immediate anonymous or individualised feedback on current levels of understanding, which informs your teaching plan as you teach it. One option is to view selections made as a class and ask individual pupils to justify their choices, giving the class an opportunity to re-vote. The answer could then be revealed by clicking on a hyperlink to go through to a relevant website.

Team competitions

Team activities can be especially useful with smaller GCSE classes which can easily be split into two.

On screen write a series of nouns or pronouns which are designated as the subjects of sentences. At the bottom of the screen write a range of verbs and objects, and perhaps adverbial phrases of time or place if appropriate. The object of the game is that a verb and object and adverbial phrase are dragged to a subject so that a coherent sentence is formed. Pupils may also be required to inflect the verb so that it is in the correct tense and person. Individual pupils from each team take it in turns to come to the board to drag and drop the language items into place to form a complete sentence. Members of their own team may shout advice to them. An added element to make the activity more exciting is to run the game against the clock: a clock facility often comes with the whiteboard software or can be downloaded or purchased from the Internet. If a timer is used, at the end of each time period a sentence completed by one person can be saved and the next team has its turn. At the end of the game, points can be allocated to each sentence according to accuracy, use of tenses, numbers completed, humour and so on. If an individual uses a tense recently learnt or an irregular verb correctly a bonus point could be awarded to the team.

Using layers to focus on grammar

The value of using layers is that, as if by magic, wrong answers disappear when dragged to a specific point on the screen whereas correct answers remain visible. If, for example, you want to focus on adjectival agreement, create a coloured box. Write the nouns on screen and drag them into the coloured box. Use a font colour which allows text to be seen against the background of the coloured box. Write on screen all adjectives from which pupils will select. Designate to the top layer the ones which agree with the nouns in the box. The ones which do not agree with any nouns in the box should be designated to the bottom layer. As pupils drag the adjectives to match the nouns in the box only the correct ones (those designated to the top layer) remain visible. The others disappear behind the box.

You could, for example, create a gap-fill exercise on the same principles. Pupils have to select the correct word or phrase to fill a gap in a sentence or paragraph. Only the correct ones remain

visible when dragged into place.

Lesson planning

If you know that in a future lesson you wish to access a specific website or open a particular sound or video file, you can prepare a flipchart/notebook in advance with hyperlinks already in place to take you to the appropriate file or web page.

When you create hyperlinks, remember that, rather than write a URL, text or images can be made into a link, thereby enabling round-the-class discussion or question-and-answer work before clicking the link and taking the lesson to its next phase or level. Remember also that downloaded items such as a web page or a YouTube video can be accessed via links placed on your prepared page.