

languages ICT



Technology for languages • Focus on spreadsheets

Most schools will have access to a spreadsheet package such as Microsoft Excel. Skills such as inputting data and calculating totals or averages are assumed in these activities, but there are no complex or advanced spreadsheet functions or formulas. Remember that you can easily modify the parameters of the activities to suit different language classes and topic contexts. If class access to computers is limited, you can input data yourself, or arrange for pupils to do so during an ICT lesson, to give more time to the language activity.

Favourite colours

Pupils can interview each other to find out favourite and least favourite colours. After listing the colours and number responses for each colour in a spreadsheet, they can prepare a pie chart to indicate findings. Selected pupils can then present orally to the class, using a simple key phrase such as 'Y is the favourite colour of x pupils.'

How many in your family?

Pupils can conduct a survey to establish key facts about their families, such as how many people have brothers or sisters (one or two plus in each case), a grandfather, a grandmother or a pet (dog, cat, fish, other). Compile the results in a spreadsheet and convert the results into a bar chart. Pupils can write up and/or present orally a summary of the findings using key phrases such as 'X pupils in my class have.....'.

Working with numbers and adjectives: Are you tall, small or average height?

Pupils can practise numbers and measurements by interviewing each other to ascertain height. After recording the data in a spreadsheet, they can present findings in a summary using the key phrase 'There are x pupils who are tall/small/more than/less than ...' or 'There are x +adj + pupils.' It is important to define terms beforehand, so that everyone is agreed on what measurements would be considered 'tall', etc. The spreadsheet can also be used to identify the tallest and smallest person and the average height of the class, which could be an opportunity to introduce superlatives to the whole class on an interactive whiteboard.

Practising adjectives of nationality

Pupils can survey the vehicles in the staff car park, noting their vehicle type, make and country of origin (of the manufacturer), determined by investigation. In a spreadsheet they list their findings under 'Vehicle type', 'Make', and 'Country'. They use the **SORT** or **FILTER** functions to identify the frequency of each vehicle type and make/country of origin. The **FILTER** allows pupils to work across more than one category, identifying, for example, the number of Japanese Four-Wheel Drives made by Nissan. They then prepare a Top 5 using key phrases such as 'There are x cars + adjective of nationality', using adjectival agreements as appropriate. In groups, pupils could also create short presentations using these phrases, national flags and, if possible, digital photos of the vehicles in question. They can present orally or prepare audio files for a sound commentary. This activity could be simplified to just vehicle types and colours.

Developing transactional skills: Planning a party

Prepare and print an imaginary Take-Away pizza menu, for example, using the appropriate currency. Instruct pupils to study the menu, and prepare an order online for a small party at home with friends. They should prepare a spreadsheet in which they type their order and the quantities required. In the final column, they should create a simple multiply formula to calculate the total cost of each item, and can use the SUM function to work out the total bill. In an email to you, they should outline the order and cost per item plus the total, with instructions to pay by credit card. Key phrases might include: 'I want/Please send me...', 'I have ordered...', 'My address is...' etc.

Developing listening skills: Eating out

Prepare and print a restaurant menu and record 3 dialogues with a FLA on what s/he spent on 3 different nights eating out there. The pupils access a spreadsheet listing the menu items, with three adjacent columns to represent each night out. Pupils listen to identify what was eaten on each night and input the price next to the correct item. They must then work out the total cost for each night and prepare a brief oral report.

Comparing pocket money

Pupils can analyse how they spend their pocket money over a period of time by means of a spreadsheet. They use a simple formula to convert their expenditure per item or event (a night out, for example) into euros or another currency. They can also calculate average expenditure per week and overall per item. This information can be incorporated into an email message, including commentary on the most costly outlay over the period and a set of resolutions regarding control/reduction of expenditure in future, for example. If their email partners reciprocate, pupils can work in groups to prepare and present a report, using a range of verb tenses and phrases (e.g. 'I must...') and comparative language.

Budgeting for summer clothes

This activity focuses on buying clothing for a holiday abroad and is useful for practising verb tenses. Pupils first spend up to 15 minutes on a fashion website, such as www.laredoute.fr, to select their clothes. They then prepare a spreadsheet listing the items bought and the cost, and use the SUM function to calculate the total expenditure. Each pupil or group then chooses an envelope containing a budget limit. If they have over-spent, they must decide which clothes to return. If they are under-spent, they can return to the website and choose more items. Finally, they write up what they bought, the cost, and their budget allowance. If they are over or below budget they should explain what they WILL do next.

Analysing Christmas present data

After Christmas, pupils work with a dictionary, FLA or on the Internet to identify key vocabulary for the presents they bought for family and friends. They list the items in a spreadsheet, with the price in pounds in the adjacent column. Pupils can use the spreadsheet to calculate the total spent and the average cost per present, and to create a bar chart of their expenditure. Selected pupils can then report orally to the class in the past tense, using the bar chart as a visual, perhaps within an illustrated PowerPoint presentation. If done before Christmas, this activity could be used to practise the future tense. Whole class work could also focus on compiling the totals in a spreadsheet and then working out the average expenditure per pupil on presents.

Research to create promotional material

Pupils can prepare a presentation and/or brochure for the town council, promoting their region to a visiting delegation from the country of the target language. Pupils work in small teams to investigate their region/town. They use the Internet to identify hotels within a given price range, travel costs by plane or train plus ferry from specific locations in the target language country, and also to monitor temperatures for a given period. They input data into a spreadsheet to calculate highest, lowest and average prices, temperatures etc. and prepare the documentation for the town council.

Investigating house prices

Pupils prepare an article on house prices for a local newspaper. They can use estate agency websites or conduct their own investigations to determine the range of house price, location within the area and property features. Pupils input the data into a spreadsheet under headings such as price, location, number of bedrooms, garage, central heating and so on. They can use **AUTOFILTER** to establish common features within certain price ranges. Finally, they prepare the article, highlighting the range of properties available, the dearest and cheapest locations, and what a buyer can get in different price bands. They can also propose a 'House of the Month' and justify their choice.

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

Note: Examples are based on Microsoft Excel, but most ideas will be relevant to other software available in schools. Reference to specific products does not imply endorsement by CILT, the National Centre for Languages nor ALL.