

B1+ Reading, Speaking and Writing Online

This is a lesson recently carried out online by two teacher trainers. Teachers are invited to adapt it to suit their own classrooms and their own teaching situation. In the follow-up there are other ideas on how to conduct, for example, an online writing project.

Aim: To discover sts' approaches and feelings towards online teaching and learning through a reading and writing activity

Level/age: Teenagers/adults

Materials: Letter from teacher(s)

Preparation: Write a letter to your students, which you want them to respond to. Letters from the two trainers and a response from one student are attached as examples.

Procedure:

1. Lead-in

Discuss how and to what extent sts use the internet to help improve their English apart from attending online lessons.

2. Reading ****

We have written a letter each about our experience of teaching you English online. In our letters we answer the questions below:

1. What is positive about teaching online?
2. What is different/negative about teaching online?
3. What are our conclusions?

Draw a table like this on a piece of paper. You have 3-5 minutes (depending on level) to read the letters and note down any differences.

| | Question 1 (same/differences) | Question 2 (same/differences) | Question 3 (same/differences) |
|--------------|--|--|--|
| Jess | | | |
| Simon | | | |

1. St-St feedback – open feedback on above
2. Feedback on content and format of letters.

Any comments and questions about what we write in our letters in terms of opinion? Is there anything you agree/disagree with? One letter was handwritten, the other wasn't. Which format did you prefer reading and why?

3. Noticing exercise on language use:

Sts look at the letters again and choose one or two phrases/words they would like to ask more about (T gives an example first).

Whole class feedback.

4. Freer speaking

We have written and spoken about teaching online. Now discuss the questions below. You have 5-10 mins (depending on level)

1. What is positive about learning English online?
2. What is different/negative about learning English online?
3. Which particular skills do you think a teacher needs to teach effectively online? (e.g. clear instructions)
4. What are your conclusions?

6. Language upgrade

Feedback from Ts on the content of sts' discussions along with their use of language.

7. Guided writing task

Homework: Sts write a letter about learning English online, using ideas from their discussion above.

***** A possible jigsaw alternative to this, if there are enough students, is to put the students in different breakout rooms and to read different letters. They focus on the same questions as in 2) above and report back, establishing similarities and differences.*

See: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/dec/07/can-technology-replace-teachers-google>

Contributed by Simon Marshall and Jess Mosley, York
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Follow-up/Alternative: Many years ago when teaching in Turkey, my teaching partner and I set up a learner-centred writing project with two of our classes. We supplied them with exercise books and wrote a letter in each one, telling them something about ourselves and our interests and our lives in the UK and asked them some questions about their interests, families, ambitions, etc. They had to respond for homework. We responded to their replies, but after that it was voluntary. This kind of project would work so much

better online via email or blogs (far less work for the teacher, for a start!). We found it a lot of work, but also very rewarding and the sts' writing fluency and confidence definitely improved over the semester and it gave them a valid reason for writing. If you do set up a similar writing project online, there are a couple of things to take into consideration:

- after the first obligatory homework email, further emails are written voluntarily
- don't correct the sts' writing, but when you respond reformulate some of their mistakes in your reply
- if you receive an email, always respond, even if it is only a line to say you are "very busy at the moment, but will reply when you have more time"
- if someone writes about his/her personal problems, don't get involved, but say you are sorry to hear about the problem and suggest they speak to their parents, a trusted friend or student support services
- it can be adapted to all ages/levels from strong A2 and 12+ years upwards.

(Sandra Piai and Tanwir Shah)

Simon letter

Dear Friends,

Just a few words to share with you about teaching English online.

The first thing to say is that I was able to hear you speak much more easily online, especially when you were working in pairs and groups. This helped me

to note down things you said before we had whole group feedback. It was also really helpful to be able to share the online whiteboard with you, so that we could both write on it without any difficulty. I also felt there was a very good atmosphere in this “virtual classroom,” even when things went wrong with the technology! I am also extremely grateful for the patience to you all for the patience you have shown with me and the trainee teachers while we have been struggling to adapt to this new way of teaching.

One of the main difficulties for me was using the technology efficiently. I often felt anxious about making mistakes and pushing the wrong button! When my WiFi crashes unexpectedly, then I almost go mad! I also missed being in a live classroom with you where we can move around, change seats and be more intimate in general.

Overall, teaching online has been a very positive experience for me. I am pleasantly surprised by how enjoyable the lessons were to teach as I feared beforehand that it the process might seem too impersonal, but this is not the case at all.

I look forward to working with you online (and live!) in the future.

Warmest regards,

Simon

(255 words)

Simon handwritten letter

Dear Veronica, Nathana, Carla, Sofia and Tarja,
I hope this letter finds you all well.

Thank you very much for attending Friday's lesson about teaching and learning English online.

I really enjoyed the experience of working with you all, and teaching in partnership with Jess was great.

As you can see, I'm sending you this letter in hand written form. I wonder if reading handwriting makes it a different process as a reader, and, if so what these differences are? Do you think it is better for teachers to use keyboard text when they teach online, or should they continue to write on the digital whiteboard as well?

I am asking you this because I'm interested to know how positive classroom dynamics and rapport can be maintained and improved online. If you can offer any suggestions, then please include or add them to the letter Jess and I asked you to send us by Monday midday (4th May).

As we said, we would like to offer you some other classes before the next course starts on May 25th. Would class times between 10:30 - 11:30 or 2:30 - 3:30 be better for you?

Thanks very much and enjoy the rest of your weekend!
Kind regards,
Aron.

Dear friends

I wanted to put down some thoughts about teaching online.

To be honest, moving online was a bit of a shock to the system, and I was worried that I wasn't technological enough to make it work. However, I actually really enjoyed our first few lessons online, and found that I didn't have to change my teaching style too much. I found that we could still have good discussions, and I could listen easily to you and respond to you naturally. I could also include a variety of different activities in the lessons, including listening exercises and even YouTube videos!

There are a couple of differences to online teaching which I have found challenging. First, it took longer to get activities started. Especially when we started teaching and we were all new to Zoom, it took longer to use the breakout rooms and start the lesson in general. Over time, we have all got used to this so less time is spent on it. Secondly, I miss seeing the interaction between you when you are talking in pairs or groups. We are all in one big group online, so it's harder to catch these exchanges.

To round up, I think teaching online is much more fun and engaging than I thought it would be. In an ideal world, I would do both, as I see that online teaching will be more common in the future, but I also believe that we make valuable connections and friendships in face-to-face teaching which I wouldn't want to lose. I also want to say thank you for making this new experience such a positive one, and for your patience with us all as we got used to this new way of working and interacting.

Looking forward to working with you all in the future, wherever it may be!

Very best wishes

Jess

(310)

Student response

Dear Jessica and Simon.

I wanted put down some thoughts about the online English lessons.

I really enjoyed the experience of having these lessons ~~at~~ at home.

I think it was fantastic and everyone managed their job very well. It ~~was~~ not easy for Amy, George and Ryan ~~to~~ start teaching on the Internet. But it's thanks to the Internet that we could attend these fantastic lessons. As I have already said I know for them it was not easy but ~~after the tutoring~~ they managed really well.

Besides, I think teaching online is not so different to ~~teaching~~ teaching face to face. The most difficult thing may be was become familiar with the use of Zoom.

It took longer ~~to~~ to get activities started, but to be honest everyone was quick to adapt.

Furthermore ~~teaching online~~ having online lessons was really fun and it could be easier for shy people because you can also choose to turn the camera off.

I want give some advice to ~~the~~ new teachers. Firstly, try to be quiet, don't be nervous. If you are ready to the virtual classes, you are ready for this as well. Secondly, I think it's better for ~~the~~ student do different activities everytime like ~~listening~~ reading or ~~speaking~~ talking to each other. Third, it doesn't really matter if they use the keyboard text or

Student response (cont)

the digital whiteboard when they teach online.
In conclusion, having these lessons has been a very positive
experience for me. Thank you very ^{much} to have allowed us
to participate in these lessons. ~~and~~ I hope it will be
possible continue ~~working~~ before with these classes before
May 25th.

P.s: ~~It~~ It will be better attend these classes during
the morning. But if you can't, for me everytime
is fine. I'll try to attend your classes.

Best regards,
Sofia.