

Using video

Thanikachalam Murugavel turns on the television for his engineering students.

During the past two decades, liberalisation of education has resulted in tremendous growth in the study of engineering in India. The number of colleges offering a variety of intra- and inter-disciplinary engineering courses has grown dramatically. Tens of thousands of students graduate each year and a good number of them wish to continue their studies abroad, particularly in countries such as the United States, Britain, Canada and Australia. These students, apart from having a good academic record, are required to be proficient in verbal, analytical and quantitative skills and their ability is tested through several examinations like TOEFL, TSE, TWE, GRE, CAT, GMAT, etc. While TOEFL, TSE and TWE test grammatical proficiency in English, the other exams have a section testing knowledge in verbal skills. Moreover, when students are admitted to Masters courses abroad, they need to interact with the people there, and thus it is vital for them to be familiar with prevailing vocabulary usage, idiom, pronunciation, etc.

Watching video

This situation demands a tool that enables students to listen to different varieties of English in terms of pronunciation, intonation, vocabulary, idiom and usage, and also to observe non-verbal gestures in relation to particular situations and cultures.

It is sometimes difficult even for a native speaker to follow a conversation without observing the person who is speaking. As video blends the visual and the auditory with original language and cultural details, it makes an excellent tool for preparing students for study abroad.

When video is used for language learning, students are exposed to the non-verbal communication – facial expressions and body language – as well as to pronunciation, stress, tone and other aspects of verbal communication.

Video also has the advantage that it can be repeated: it may be fast-forwarded, rewound, paused or even stopped to allow for discussion or clarification.

Recording video

Another area where video may be usefully employed is in recording and analysing students' problems, finding solutions to them and practising the skills necessary for a particular task. For example, it can be used to help students develop the skills necessary for successful performance in job interviews. A simulated job interview session may be arranged and videotaped, with a panel consisting of engineering teachers, industry representatives and language teachers conducting the interviews. This enables the students to see themselves in action and appreciate how they look in an interviewer's eyes. It reveals involuntary actions which may show certain traits and characteristics they are not aware of. Sometimes only when they actually see the kinds of mannerisms they have, how confident or nervous they are when facing questions, how they react to tricky questions, how they sit, and other similar quirks can they accept that they have certain strengths or weaknesses. After making the video, teachers can initiate discussion on how the students rate their own performance and also identify areas that need improvement. Based on their response, they can then explain or analyse every individual's achievement with special reference to their non-verbal communication – body posture, gestures, facial expressions, etc – and provide tips for improvement and corrective measures.

Exploiting video

Commercially-produced videos, such as CUP's *Professional Presentations*, can also be used effectively to improve students' speaking skills. This particular course aims to teach presentation skills in English to professionals at intermediate level and above. It contains extracts of

formal and informal interactions, shows how not to do a presentation, how product presentations are made, and in the process gives something very close to 'hands-on experience', as the students watch how professionals prepare and make presentations.

Video can also be used to great effect in developing the skills needed for students to participate successfully in brainstorming sessions (in their offices) or in group discussions in workshops. A technique similar to the one described above can be used.

Selecting video

Before choosing a video to use, teachers need to decide what they want their students to learn from it and also bear in mind the students' level of comprehension. They may want to prepare their own material. For example, teachers who want to teach the difference between formal and informal greetings might select and record relevant scenes from movies or plays. The length of the video should also be a consideration.

Videos of TV commercials can be short, creative, original and attention-grabbing. Commercials arouse students' creative thinking and thereby motivate them to make more of a contribution to learning activities. They also give clues about the culture, nationality and situation of the people who appear in them, and in the process communicate the meaning of what is spoken. They may be used to teach interpretation of non-verbal gestures, cultural implications and the natural usage of a particular word or phrase.

Any video that is chosen should be viewed critically beforehand to check that there are no controversial scenes or language which may cause offence because of differences in culture.

Before viewing

Before showing the video, the teachers will need to introduce the topic and tell the students what they will be viewing, what they will be learning and what they are expected to do. The teacher should also ensure that all students can hear and see the video clearly.

While viewing

A variety of activities may be done using videos. The following are a few suggestions of things you can ask your students to do. You can use your own

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ingenuity and imagination to devise others to suit your students.

- 1 assume the part of a character on screen and respond to a situation
- 2 discuss a particular scene
- 3 identify the type of English being spoken (American, British, Australian, etc)
- 4 find differences in the speakers' pronunciation of certain words from their own
- 5 listen to particular idioms and guess their meaning from the context; match idioms with their meanings on a worksheet

When students are watching a video, it is important that the teacher remain in the room to observe the students' reactions to the scenes displayed and note them down for future discussion or clarification during a post-viewing session. The tape may be paused or stopped for this purpose.

After viewing

When the video is over, teachers should encourage students to participate in follow-up activities such as taking part in a discussion or recording their observations on a worksheet. Using these responses, teachers can then give feedback or repeat the video and explain or elaborate the answers.

Video, therefore, not only acts as a tool to help students hone the language skills that will be essential for successful performance during their academic and professional careers, but also exposes them to information about the cultures in which they seek to continue their studies and makes the learning process interactive and interesting. 

Goodale, M 1998 *Professional Presentations* CUP



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Which exam?

Jon Marks looks at the business of choosing an exam.

Choosing, or helping students to choose, a Business English exam can be a daunting task. Some are fairly wide in their scope, others have more specific applications. Many are composed of modules which candidates can combine to suit their particular needs and abilities. Students wanting to take a Business English exam will often have a specific and immediate objective, making it vital to choose an exam which is suitable for that objective, and which the student has a good chance of passing.

The following listings are of major internationally-recognised Business English exams. There are numerous national exams and some for very specific purposes (eg air traffic controllers) which are not included here. The details are, to the best of my knowledge, correct at the time of writing. Please contact the examining bodies directly for further details and updates.

Business English Certificates (BEC)

Cambridge ESOL,
1 Hills Road, Cambridge, CB1 2EU, UK
Tel: +44 1223 553355
Fax: +44 1223 460278
Website: www.CambridgeESOL.org
Email: esol@ucles.org.uk

BEC Preliminary

Lower-intermediate (Council of Europe B1). There is a Reading and Writing paper, featuring tasks such as multiple-choice gap fills and form filling. In the Writing component, candidates have to produce a piece of internal company communication and a piece of external business communication. There is a Listening Paper, and a Test of Speaking, which is conducted by external examiners with pairs of candidates. One of the Test of Speaking tasks is to give a 'mini presentation' lasting about one minute.

The grades are Pass with Merit, Pass, Narrow Fail and Fail. It is possible to pass

without achieving a pass mark for every component.

BEC Vantage

Upper-intermediate (Council of Europe B2). The Reading and Writing papers are separate, but in other respects the format is similar to BEC Preliminary. The grades are A, B, C (passes), D and E (fails).

BEC Higher

Advanced (Council of Europe C1). The format is similar to BEC Vantage.

Business Language Testing Service (BULATS)

Website: www.bulats.org

BULATS was devised by Alliance Française, The Goethe-Institut, Universidad de Salamanca and University of Cambridge Examinations Syndicate (UCLES), and is available in English, French, German and Spanish. Thanks to this and a worldwide network of agents, there are numerous sources of information about the exams. One option is to contact Cambridge ESOL: see the contact details given under Business English Certificates (BEC) above.

BULATS is a language assessment service for companies and other organisations (eg colleges). Its uses include:

- Evaluating the language skills of company staff and job applicants
- Evaluating the effectiveness of language training
- Assessing a company's language requirements.

Organisations purchase testing materials to administer to their staff, trainees or students. It is also possible to become a BULATS agent, effectively reselling the service locally. Agents are subject to vetting and training procedures.