

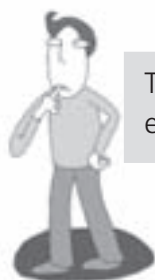
Exemplar 20

Course area: Interpreting (Language Skills for Interpreters)

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This Exemplar illustrates the way in which a tailor-made website can encourage students to start using a whole range of other relevant sites.

I teach a course for people who wish to become language interpreters, called Interpreting Preparatory. The subject that I am going to describe, ‘Language Skills for Interpreters’, forms part of the course.

In the regional areas, we can get students in one class who speak many different languages, which has created difficulties in providing adequate support for the Language Skills subject. For that reason, we’ve tried to develop alternate ways of helping students develop their skills in the language other than English.

Even though the way I’m using online approaches is limited at the moment, I am very interested in this area, and believe that there is a lot of potential to use these methods to teach interpreters. To start off with, it was all new, but I’m planning to make a lot more use of online approaches. So far, what we’ve done is develop a website and a pilot CD that can be used to practice interpreting, and we have introduced telephone mentoring from an accredited interpreter. I’ll talk about each of these three approaches.

The website for the course was not developed by me personally. I was able to arrange some funding to employ an expert to get it up and running. The site is accessible via my Institute’s site. We tested it with the students of the course last year, and the feedback was very positive.

The site is currently being revised to make it more user-friendly and to ensure that it can easily be accessed through reader-type software used by the vision impaired. Hopefully, the site will be live in the next few weeks. After that, it will be a constant and ongoing process to keep it up to date.

We also want to keep refining the site. I belong to various associations for interpreters and translators, and I’m constantly receiving news about good resources and links that we can add. Also, as we continue to deliver the course, we will add links to sites that are in languages relevant to the students. Ultimately, my vision is that there will be forums and chat-sessions available but, at the moment, we mainly use it for information and to encourage people to use the internet for their studies.

The course works like this: I start off with a three hour session to introduce the website and how to use it. This is especially important for students who may not have access to a computer or the internet at home. Accessing the site is really up to them, and there is no expectation that everyone will use the site. It is really there for added support if people need it. Many of my students have home computers, but some have to go elsewhere to get online.

My main purpose is to encourage students to explore other sites relating to their language. So the site not only has all the course information, but a lot of links to other language sites. I really want them to look at current information from the country where the language is spoken, so that they can keep up with the development and use of the language. They can read newspapers and other information that will help them with the course and with interpreting in general.

Once they start exploring, students often find lots of sites dealing with language and translation, and value the opportunity to explore, as their feedback confirms:

'The session which gave an introduction to accessing resources on the Internet was very useful and important.'

'The website has got a huge potential and should be expanded in future. Links to resources such as medical and legal glossaries and government sites are all important for development of terminology.'

'I consider [your] website a gateway for me to indulge myself!'

At the moment we have links to a range of other language sites, as well as general links to sites that are important to interpreters and translators. I plan to add links to other language sites as more students enroll from different language groups.

Another new element in the course is the use of CDs. Until now, people have used cassettes to practice their interpreting but, to make things more flexible, we decided to develop a CD. The CD has a variety of elements. There are video clips, and other resources which encourage interaction. On a CD, you can stop the clip, take your time to interpret, then restart it, hear the passage being interpreted and, in the process, check whether your understanding is correct. It is a much more realistic situation when you can actually see people rather than just hear them on a cassette tape.

Another approach we've tried successfully is to have a system of mentors. My students come from a range of different language backgrounds. It is much better if they have one-on-one support. So we've arranged for each student to get 30 minutes of personal tutoring each week. Mentoring happens via telephone, with the tutors based in Sydney and Wollongong. The tutors are accredited and practising interpreters and are matched with a student who speaks the same language. Most of the help provided by the tutors relates to techniques and terminology, although sometimes cultural issues are addressed as well.

The Virtual Library and CD that I described earlier have only been trialled once, but there has been some feedback about the use of the telephone mentoring system. Some students felt that it is wonderful, very helpful and innovative. Others did not really feel it helped them much. I guess the beauty of blended learning is that there are many resources and learning methods that students can choose from and combine to meet their own individual learning needs.

Comments on my own learning...

I've learnt from a variety of sources, including being a participant in two *LearnScope* projects. The idea for the Virtual Library really resulted from the first *LearnScope* project I participated in. There was nothing really specific in the project that I can attribute the idea to, but doing it gave me the opportunity to think about how else to meet students' needs.

The *LearnScope* projects have helped me become more familiar with e-learning. I have learnt about how sites are constructed, and about chats and forums. I also participated in the *NET*Working 2002* conference, which was a fantastic learning experience. I can foresee having chats and forums as part of the learning for the Interpreting course in the future.

The idea for the CD resulted from a practical experience I had. After being involved in administering an external exam for translators, some candidates commented on how difficult it is to sit a test in interpreting when one only hears the speech without also seeing the body-language. I started to think about how could we make the practice of interpreting more real by showing body-language. Videos are clumsy, and CD's seemed the way to go.

I'm really pleased with my idea, although at the moment, we have not been able to get funding to develop it further.

