

# English-trailers.com: A Website to Increase Student Interest Via Movie Trailers

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In the spring of 2003, a non-profit website for L2 learners to study English via movie trailers—English Trailers <[www.english-trailers.com](http://www.english-trailers.com)>—joined the growing number of Internet sites created for non-native speakers of English. Movie trailers, which are freely available on the web, are an excellent source of authentic English. They are brimming with natural dialogue, cultural references, idioms and slang, literary allusions, and other rich examples of language. Starting with the basics, the site has grown and been refined to meet the needs of learners and to stay current with technology. The current version provides a more intuitive interface and increased functionality. This paper will describe the rationale behind the design of this site, a description of the newer features that aid users of this site, student response, and several planned additions to improve the site. English Trailers is an organic site—it will never be complete.

2003年の春、映画の予告編を通じて英語が勉強できる英語学習者のためのサイトEnglish Trailers (<http://www.english-trailers.com>) が、数多く増えつつある外国語学習サイトに加わった。ウェブ上で無料で利用できる映画予告編は、非常に優れた生の英語教材である。これらは、自然なダイアログや、参考すべき文化的内容、慣用語や俗語などの宝庫である。初期のEnglish Trailersはごく簡易なものであったが、最新版は、より直感的なインターフェースと多機能を提供している。この論文では、このサイトのデザインにおける合理性、ユーザーが使いやすいように工夫された新しい特徴、学生の反応、そして、今後の改善点を論じる。English Trailersは有機的なもので、今後も成長し続けるであろう。

For decades, movies have been a popular language teaching pedagogical tool (Donley, 2000; Meloni, 1998; Migliacci, 2002; Miriam, 1999). However, only relatively recently have teachers begun exploiting the pedagogical advantages of movie trailers (Gebhardt, 2004). This paper presents English Trailers <[www.english-trailers.com](http://www.english-trailers.com)> (Figure 1), a free, non-commercial website utilizing movie trailers created by the author for learners of English. This site currently contains over 80 trailers (linked to Apple's trailer site) of various genres and levels of difficulty, each with supplementary activities to enhance and assess comprehension. After a discussion of the advantages of utilizing multimedia to create autonomous, student-centered learning environments, a description of the site will be provided including the recently added ability to have students' scores saved.

The screenshot shows the front page of the English Trailers website. On the left, there is a sidebar with the site's logo 'www.english-trailers.com' and instructions for users. The main content area features a movie trailer for 'War of the Worlds'. The trailer player shows a green screen with the text: 'THE FOLLOWING PREVIEW HAS BEEN APPROVED FOR ALL AUDIENCES BY THE MOTION PICTURE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA'. Below the trailer, there are navigation tabs for 'Instructions', 'Summary', 'Cloze', 'Script', 'Quiz', and 'Web Links'. A red warning message states: 'This site requires QuickTime. Click HERE to get it for FREE.' Below this, there are several paragraphs of text providing instructions on how to use the site's features, such as clicking on red words in the summary and script for definitions, and navigating between different trailers.

**www.english-trailers.com**

Study English using movie commercials!  
Read the instruction in the middle of the screen first

**STEP 1:**  
Choose a movie from the list below.  
then go to STEP 2 below the list

55 trailers found

- 50 First Dates
- A Bug's Life
- A Hard Day's Night
- A Home at the End of the World
- Alamo, The
- Alexander

[A](#) [B](#) [C](#) [D](#) [E](#) [F](#) [G](#) [H](#) [I](#) [J](#) [K](#) [L](#) [M](#)  
[N](#) [O](#) [P](#) [Q](#) [R](#) [S](#) [T](#) [U](#) [V](#) [W](#) [X](#) [Y](#) [Z](#)

[Show ALL Titles](#)

**STEP 2:** Click the button below.

[Change Movie Trailers](#)

[Need help looking for a movie trailer? Advanced Search](#)

[Create Username](#)

[Log In](#)

[Links](#) [About Site](#)

## War of the Worlds

This trailer is the property of:  
DreamWorks

THE FOLLOWING **PREVIEW** HAS BEEN APPROVED FOR  
**ALL AUDIENCES**  
BY THE MOTION PICTURE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

Push the ► to PLAY

[Instructions](#) [Summary](#) [Cloze](#) [Script](#) [Quiz](#) [Web Links](#)

**This site requires QuickTime. Click HERE to get it for FREE.**

Above this text, there are 5 - 7 tabs. Use these to try the different activities for this trailer.

It's recommended to start with "summary," next "cloze," "script," then "quiz" and finally "web links"

Some short trailers *don't* have a "quiz." But some have a "talk!" tab. This is a good way to practice your speaking ability in English!

Above the tabs is the movie. Just below the movie are the control controls. Here you can adjust the volume, play/pause, and fast forward / rewind.

If you move the mouse over a red word in the "summary" and "script," a definition and example sentence will appear.

**<< IF YOU WANT TO WATCH A DIFFERENT TRAILER, FOLLOW STEPS 1 AND 2 ON YOUR LEFT <<**

And be sure to visit the **QuickTime** site to see lots of other trailers!

Figure 1. The front page of English Trailers.

The combination of the Internet and affordable personal computers created a paradigm shift in the utilization of computer based SLA applications. Prior to this shift, the majority of CALL materials were located on central mainframes, such as on a university campus, accessible only by affiliated users (Chapelle, 2001). Times have changed and teachers are now more likely to complain of being overwhelmed by the vast amount of teaching materials available on the web (Felix, 1999). One reason for the ever growing number of SLA sites is the improvement in WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get) web site development programs, such as Dreamweaver and GoLive, that enable non-programmers to combine text, pictures, sounds, and movies (commonly referred to as multimedia) to develop professional looking web pages. The increasing number of SLA websites is one clue that more and more language educators are shedding their fears of technology and realizing its potential as a supplemental teaching tool.

The reduction in cost of the personal computer has also led to an increasing number of high schools and universities with computer rooms. Teachers are taking advantage of this relatively newfound asset by converting traditional “chalk and talk” teacher centered activities into multimedia student centered activities (Chapelle, 2001; Herron, Morris, Secules, and Curtis, 1995; Parks, Huot, Hamers, and H.-Lemonnier, 2003). One reason for the popularity of multimedia-based sites is that autonomous, student-centered learning environments are possible. It has been shown that by giving students control over their learning, motivation and interest increase (Ryan, 1998). One traditional teacher centered class activity revolves around showing movies in class. Although

supplementary activities give students some control, as long as the teacher has power over playback, it is essentially a teacher-controlled environment. By utilizing multimedia in a computer lab, it is possible to transfer the playback controls to the control of each student, creating a more stimulating and enjoyable environment.

One of the pedagogical advantages of movies is that they are a source of authentic communication (Canning-Wilson, 2000; Donley, 2000; Kilickaya, 2004). Additionally, movies are a means of teaching Western culture, customs and history (Shawback & Terhune, 2002). However, the use of authentic materials may require extensive teacher preparation to ensure that students have the necessary cultural background to understand them (Richards, 2001).

Video, with its audio and visual components, provides multiple modes of input that simulate real communicative conditions (Kellerman, 1992). Video allows learners to become eyewitnesses to the dynamics of interpersonal communication with all its idiosyncrasies, body language, and other nuances that are lost when represented by audio only. Research has also shown that the combination of audio and video increases comprehension (Secules, Herron, and Tomasello, 1992).

Video is just one example of how combining multiple modes of input can be used to increase student comprehension. Heron (1994) suggests “pictures, verbal descriptions, key vocabulary, pre-questioning techniques and cultural background cues” (p. 190) in conjunction with video to increase comprehension. Chapelle (2004) also describes empirical evidence which shows that students benefit when pedagogical aids are presented in various forms (text, audio,

pictures, and video). Although it is true that traditional non-computer based classrooms offer multiple forms of input, what is unique about multimedia is the use of linking that allows for efficient packaging of materials ready for students to examine when they feel they are needed, not when the teacher feels they are.

As the number of Internet connections has grown simultaneously with connection speeds, video has become a more common form of presentation on the Internet. Movie trailers, found at sites such as Apple QuickTime <[www.apple.com/trailers/](http://www.apple.com/trailers/)>, Yahoo! Movies <[movies.yahoo.com/trailers/](http://movies.yahoo.com/trailers/)>, and Movie List <[www.movie-list.com/](http://www.movie-list.com/)>, constitute a source of freely available, authentic materials. Additionally, the majority of movies, regardless of budget, have an official movie site providing background and production information. Sites such as Yahoo! Movies <[movies.yahoo.com/](http://movies.yahoo.com/)> and the Internet Movie Database <[imdb.com](http://imdb.com)> have a page for all major actors, directors, and movies, providing a plethora of information that can be used to make supplementary materials.

Mining the abundance of trailers and movie-related sites, it is possible to create effective, thought-provoking lessons based on a one-and-a-half to three-minute trailer. The remainder of this paper describes English Trailers, a web site devoted to the study of English via movie trailers which takes advantage of multimedia technology to create a student-centered learning environment.

## English Trailers: A Description

English Trailers was initially created to be a place where autonomous learners of English of intermediate level and above could study using a topic that they enjoy: movies. As shown in Figure 1, the English Trailers page view contains two main sections. Running down the left side is the main menu. The main purpose of this area is to find and select trailers for studying, but links to other functions are also provided. The main area to the right of the menu shows the currently selected trailer and a menu of available related activities. Each movie trailer offers four to six of the following activities: *summary*, *cloze*, *script*, *talk!1*, *quiz* and *web links*. While the *summary*, *cloze*, *script* and *web links* are included for all trailers, the *talk!1* and *quiz* activities are optional.

One main objective when initially conceptualizing the site was to make a site that could be used by students from around the world without the need of teacher assistance. The following is a list of the underlying concepts considered when designing the site:

- It must be intuitive enough for a non-native speaker of English to be able to quickly grasp how to use it
- It must be intuitive enough for a non-computer savvy person to be able to quickly grasp how to use it
- The activities should not be overwhelming in terms of difficulty
- Users should be able to select trailers based upon their level of difficulty

- The site should increase intrinsic motivation of students
- The site should be dynamic. It must be possible to build upon the current base of activities.
- The site should be all English.
- The site should be free and without ads.

The site currently contains activities for over 80 trailers (the trailers are not contained at the site, but rather are linked from Apple's trailer site) with new trailers being added each month. The main menu area of English Trailers has an *advanced search* function (Figure 2) allowing students and teachers to find trailers appropriate for their levels and preferences. In addition to being able to sort trailers by level (easy, medium, hard), trailers can be grouped by actor, genre, and year of release. This feature allows learners to have a more enjoyable learning experience, because they can quickly find a trailer right for them, rather than having to sift through the various trailers.

In addition to providing a summary and script to enhance comprehension of the trailers by students, English Trailers contains a database of over 2,400 potentially difficult words or expressions. In the summary and script offered for each trailer, selected vocabulary words are highlighted. When the user moves the mouse over one of these words, an appropriate combination of a definition, note, example sentence or picture is provided (Figure 3). As the meanings of words often change depending on context, Kang (1995) points out the problems of presenting a generic dictionary definition. To overcome this, only the meaning of the word applicable to how it is used in the context in which it is



Figure 2. The advanced search function



The screenshot shows a website interface for the movie trailer 'War of the Worlds'. At the top, there are navigation buttons for 'Instructions', 'Summary', 'Cloze', 'Script', 'Quiz', and 'Web Links'. The main content area is titled 'War of the Worlds' and contains several paragraphs of text. The word 'confident' is highlighted in red in the text. A green-bordered pop-up box appears over the word 'confident', containing a 'Definition-' and an 'Example-'. The text in the paragraphs is as follows:

**Narrator:** No one would have believed in the early years of the 21st century that our world was being watched by **intelligences** greater than our own.

That as men busied themselves about their various **concerns**, they observed and studied.

With **infinite complacency**, men went to and fro about the **globe**, **confident** of their **empire** over this world.

Yet, across the **gulf of space**, **intellects vast and cool and envious eyes**.

And slowly and surely drew their plans against us.

**Definition-** to be sure or certain of something; to strongly believe in something with good reason

**Example-** I am *confident* I will pass the test next week because I studied very hard for it.

Figure 3. An example of the pop-up vocabulary feature found in the summary and scripts. In this case, the user has moved the mouse over the word confident.

found is presented. As cultural references to U.S. celebrities, magazines, slang, etc are common in movie trailers, information regarding words of this nature is also provided.

As Nunan (1997) points out, a key element of autonomous learning environments is self-assessment. English trailers provides two such activities, a cloze quiz and a grammar based quiz. Both of these quizzes react to user input, creating a more dynamic learning environment. For example, if a cloze answer is misspelled and the *check answers* button is clicked, the initial portion of the answer prior to the spelling error remains, providing the student with a clue for the

next attempt. Similarly, if a student incorrectly chooses an answer, that answer is removed from the list of choices.

Students can discover other movie related sites in the web links section. For each trailer, three questions pertaining to the movie and five questions for each of the main actors are given, as well as links to sites where the answers can be found. For the trailer questions, students can find answers at the official movie site, Yahoo! Movies <movies.yahoo.com/>, and the Internet Movie Database <www.imdb.com>. For the actor related questions, answers can be found at three of the following sites: Yahoo! Movies, Celebrity Wonder, E!Online, the Internet Movie Database, or fan pages.

*Please enter the following information and click the button below to create your student username/password.*

**New Username:**

**Please enter a password 4-10 characters in length containing: 0-9, a-z, and A-Z**  
**New Password:**       **Verify New Password:**

**First name:**       **Last name:**

**Country you consider home:**

**Country you study English in:**

**First (Mother) Language:**

NOTE: This is OPTIONAL.  
If your teacher gave you a class code, please write it here.

**Class Code:**

Figure 4. The form used to create a student account

All students All trailers

Click to narrow search

**Scores for Class 30**

First Name	Last Name	Trailer	Exercise	date done	num correct	num possible	percent
ryota	kunisawa	Dinosaur	cloze	2004-11-15	7	7	100%
ryota	kunisawa	Dinosaur	quiz	2004-11-15	3	5	60%
ei-ji	kitazawa	Dinosaur	cloze	2004-11-15	3	7	43%
keisuke	ishida	Dinosaur	cloze	2004-11-15	5	7	71%
masaaki	nakayama	Dinosaur	cloze	2004-11-15	6	7	86%
ei-ji	kitazawa	Dinosaur	quiz	2004-11-15	3	3	100%
Nobuhiko	Ban	Dinosaur	cloze	2004-11-15	4	7	57%
masaaki	nakayama	Dinosaur	quiz	2004-11-15	3	3	100%

Figure 5. An example of a teacher’s score sheet for a class of students (Teacher’s Menu ⇨ View Scores)

Although English Trailers was initially designed to be a site for autonomous learners, additional functionality has been developed to allow for use in the CALL classroom. This allows for student scores on the cloze and quiz exercises to be recorded and for teachers to be able to access these scores. However, this only pertains to selected trailers, referred to as “graded” trailers. When a person first enters the English Trailers site, only the “non-graded” trailers are available. Users receive scores for these cloze and quiz activities, but when the user leaves the site, the scores are lost. Graded trailers, on the other hand, save the scores in a database. In order to use this feature, one must first create either a teacher or student username by filling out a short form providing basic information about oneself (Figure 4). An email address is not required.

By creating a teacher account, teachers are able to receive student cloze and quiz scores for the graded trailers. Detailed instructions for doing this are provided on the site so they

will only be summarized here. After logging in with a teacher username, the user has access to the teacher’s area where they can input their class codes. After doing so, the teacher needs to instruct his or her students to create student usernames providing the same class code when prompted. When the teacher goes to the *View Scores* section of the teacher’s menu, all student scores with a matching class code will appear (Figure 5). Scores can be sorted by a class as a whole, for an individual student, or for a single trailer.

### Site Statistics and Feedback

Although the site has been up since the spring of 2003, a hit counter has only been up since November 6, 2004. By January 6, 2005, the hit counter was well over 15,000 with over 2,800 unique visitors in November 2004 and over 3,100 in December 2004. In the first two months, over 330 users created accounts and over 260 records of student activity scores were recorded.



Student and teacher feedback regarding the site has thus far been positive with some valuable constructive criticism as well. A sample of the feedback is:

- “Fantastic site!”
- “What a cool site! Was fun to look at and very helpful for my teaching!”
- “It is a cool and useful website for English teachers and learner”
- “Good site! Keep at it. You're doing great!”
- “Keep the good working”

Feedback of this sort is extremely encouraging, but the most informative feedback comes from face-to-face discussion with other teachers who have used the site in a CALL environment. Teachers have suggested that the site would be more effective if each trailer had a learning objective/ grammar focus enabling teachers to more easily incorporate English Trailers into their own curricula. Also, requests for more communicative activities allowing students to personalize themes found in trailers have been made. This author plans to incorporate these ideas in 2005.

### Summary

A site, English Trailers <english-trailers.com>, utilizing movie trailers to aid in the study of English has been presented. This site incorporates existing pedagogical concepts in the field of CALL to create a structured environment providing cultural information, movie summaries, vocabulary assistance, and complete scripts to

aid in comprehension of movie trailers. As the site continues to grow both vertically (regular addition of new trailers) and horizontally (additional activities), the site has enormous potential to aid numerous students of English.

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