

able to make up in flexibility. When L2 classes are located in FLCs, students are available for research sampling. Empirical research based in FLCs can then generate new ideas for departments and administrations to implement into programs.

FLC-based research, however, faces two major challenges. One is the process of implementing research results into practical policy within its home institution. This often depends on the internal politics of the institution. Another challenge is reliability of research results coming from disparate centers (albeit in the same country). As in the medical field, the EFL field has a standardized code of “Best Practice” with the *Standards for Educational & Psychological Testing*. Journals such as the *JALT Journal* have a peer-review process to ensure methodology is sound. However, these standards are “top down”, and it would be useful if the field here created its own rules for practice to supplement these standards. These rules could strengthen construct validity, and possibly increase the power of experiments in research.

FLCs, if networked effectively between universities, could improve both of these issues. As a model, we could look to Primary Care Practice-based Research Networks (PBRNs) in the medical field. PBRNs, operating in US regions, are volunteer associations of primary care physicians exchanging information and conducting epidemiological studies on local

populations (Green, Hickner, & Whitman, 2005). As clinicians become primary stakeholders in research, they find practical use for results bridging the gap between researchers and clinicians (Mold & Peterson, 2005). FLC Networks could operate similarly. Through organizing research between universities and creating standards for best practice in the field, results would be more representative of student populations. In addition, the Network could advocate on behalf of these results for policy implementation.

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## TLT RESOURCES

# TLT WIRED

## ...with Edo Forsythe

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In this column, we explore the issue of teachers and technology—not just as it relates to CALL solutions, but also to Internet, software, and hardware concerns that all teachers face.

We invite readers to submit articles on their areas of interest. Please contact the editor before submitting.

TLT WIRED ONLINE: A linked index of articles can be found at:

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**Editor's note:** From smartphone apps to web-based programs, today's technology allows anyone to create tools to engage their students in learning a variety of topics. The article below describes a tool developed by a university professor to help his students learn English while exploring topics that are of interest to them. If other readers of the TLT Wired column would like to share tools or programs that they have created, please contact the editor at the email address above. Try out Paul Raine's WikiCloze tool with your students to enable them to keep their English studies *Wired!*

# WikiCloze: A web-based tool for creating interactive cloze tests from Simple English Wikipedia articles

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This article introduces *WikiCloze*, a free online tool developed by the author for creating interactive cloze tests from Simple English Wikipedia (SEW) articles on the fly. First, a brief description of cloze tests in general is provided, followed by a short introduction to the Simple English Wikipedia. The WikiCloze tool is then described in detail, and possible ways of utilizing it in the EFL classroom are discussed.

## Cloze tests

Cloze tests have long been popular methods of assessing language learners' vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension skills (Read, 1997). They have also been utilized as effective pedagogical devices that encourage readers to pay closer attention to and become more actively involved with texts, whilst developing their ability to use contextual clues to fill gaps in incomplete messages (Wonghiransombat, 2012).

Cloze tests are generated by removing a selection of words from a text, and then requiring the learner to put the missing words back in the correct places. A list of words removed may or may not be provided to the learner. Computer software can aid in the creation and administration of cloze tests.

WikiCloze takes the computerized generation of cloze tests much further by allowing the user to input keywords about almost any topic, and create interactive tests on the fly. The author therefore considers WikiCloze to be a redefinition of the cloze testing process according to Puentedura's (2012) SAMR model of the use of technology for educational purposes.

## Simple English Wikipedia

The Simple English Wikipedia (SEW) <simple.wikipedia.org> is very similar to the standard English Wikipedia <en.wikipedia.org>, the online encyclopedia that anyone can read and edit for free. However, it differs in the respect that it is written in simple English in order to be more accessible to non-native speakers of English. In terms of what constitutes simple English, the SEW's guidelines suggest that articles should be written using the most common 1000 words of the English language, and grammar should be simplified wherever possible (Simple English Wikipedia, 2013). At the time of this writing, SEW contained over 100,000 simple English articles, which can be utilized for EFL instruction in various ways (Case & Forsythe, 2013).

## WikiCloze

WikiCloze <wikicloze.paulsensei.com> is an online tool which amalgamates the cloze testing process with crowd-sourced simple English articles by drawing content directly from SEW and producing interactive cloze tests on the fly.

Articles to be converted into cloze tests are specified by a keyword entered by the user. Possible matching articles for keywords entered are automatically provided (see Figure 1).

The screenshot shows the WikiCloze web interface. At the top left, there is a search bar containing the text 'Eng'. To its right is a blue button labeled 'Generate Cloze'. Below the search bar is a dropdown menu with a list of suggestions: 'England', 'English language', 'English Premier League', 'English people', 'Engine', 'Engineer', 'Engineering', 'England national football team', 'English Channel', and 'English Civil War'. To the right of the dropdown menu, there are several text fragments: 'e largest of', 'million', 'ordered by', and 'ritain. The'. At the bottom of the dropdown menu, there is a text input field containing 'capital' followed by a dropdown arrow, and the text 'of England is London,'.

Figure 1. Automatic article suggestions based on keywords entered by the user

If the user is interested in English Premier League football, for example, they can complete a cloze test generated from an article about that topic (Figure 2). If, perhaps, they are more interested in classic American rock music, they

could enter a band name, such as *Aerosmith* into the keyword box (Figure 3). Users have almost complete freedom to choose any topic they like, the only condition being whether or not SEW has an article about it in its database.

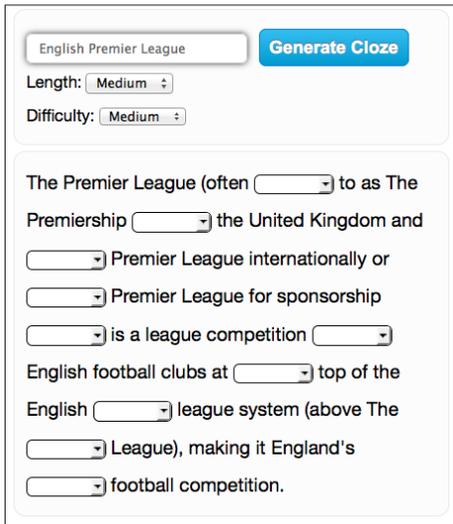


Figure 2. A cloze test generated from the keyword *English Premier League*

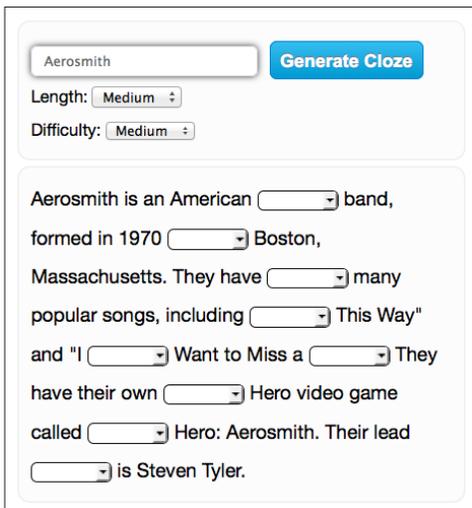


Figure 3. A cloze test generated from the keyword *Aerosmith*

After a keyword is submitted, WikiCloze returns the content of the matching article, with selection menus replacing certain words. The number of words removed and the length of the article are determined by the user in the *difficulty* and *length* settings (Figure 4). The options are intended to be intuitive and easy to understand

for English learners, and are limited to three pre-determined settings: easy, medium, and hard for the difficulty setting; and short, medium, and long for the length setting. For the easy setting in difficulty, every 10th word is removed from the article; for medium, every 5th word; and for hard, every 3rd word. For the long setting in length, the article is truncated at 100 words; for medium, 50 words, and for short, 20 words.

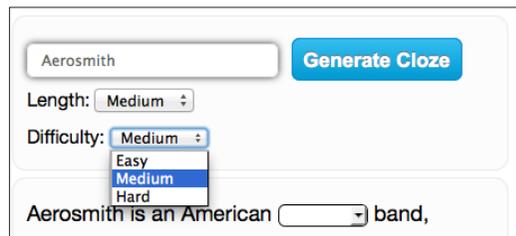


Figure 4. Options for cloze test generation

All the words removed from the article are inserted into a selection menu, and the selection menu replaces each word removed from the article. The user must choose the correct word from each selection menu in order to complete the cloze test. Answers are checked as they are selected, with correct answers highlighted in green and incorrect answers highlighted in red (Figure 5).

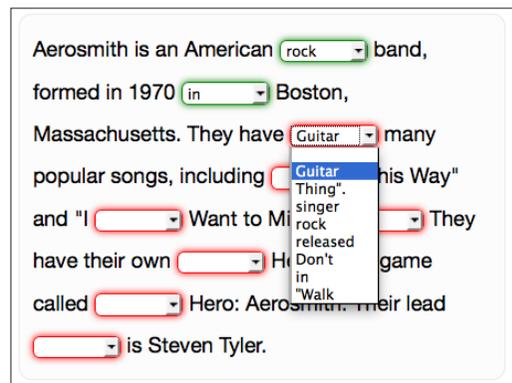


Figure 5. Answers are checked as they are selected

### Ways to use WikiCloze

WikiCloze functions on desktop PCs, tablets, and smartphones, and is usable in a range of environments both in and outside of the classroom. Teachers who wish to encourage more autonomous learning and introduce an element of negotiated study can give learners the freedom to enter any keywords they like, inspired

by hobbies, interests, recent news topics, or places and people familiar to them. Alternatively, students' use of WikiCloze can be kept more closely in line with the curriculum by providing a list of relevant keywords or topics. Keywords can also be specified by appending "?keyword=" to the WikiCloze URL. For example, if the teacher wishes to make available a cloze test about Japan, the following URL would be provided to the students: <wikicloze.paulsensei.com/?keyword=Japan>

Another feature of WikiCloze is an English-to-Japanese dictionary search tool for words in articles, which can be accessed by clicking the word the user wishes to check (Figure 6).

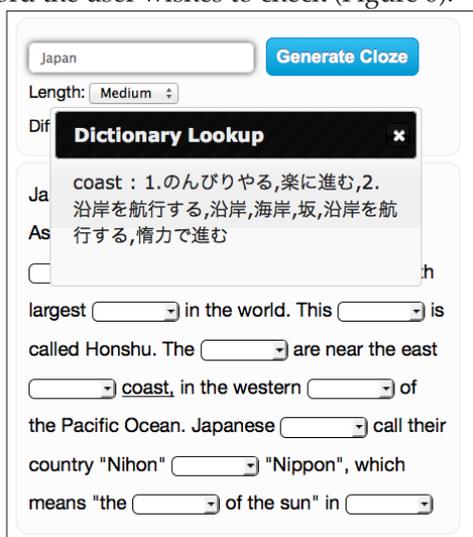


Figure 6. English-to-Japanese dictionary definition for the word “coast” in a WikiCloze test about Japan

It is also possible for students to track their progress with WikiCloze test completion if they register with the site via <paulsensei.com/user/register>. Once users are registered, they are awarded points for each article completed (one point per missing word). A high score table allows them to view their progress in relation to their classmates and peers, with the aim of encouraging further study. Users are also able to see which articles other students have been studying via the *popular articles* function, and clicking on article titles allows them to generate cloze tests from the same articles (Figure 7).



Figure 7. A list of popular articles being studied via WikiCloze

### Future development

WikiCloze is under continuous development, and many additional features are planned for future versions, including the ability to select the type of word (i.e., part of speech) removed from articles. The author is interested in receiving feedback and suggestions for further improvements to WikiCloze, and details about how teachers use it in their classes. It is hoped that WikiCloze will be an effective and enjoyable educational tool for English learners in Japan and across the world.

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