

# An Attempt to Improve Four Skills of English: Use them

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This presentation introduces a one semester course which aims to improve all four English language skills: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. The target group is second year students attending Kagoshima Immaculate Heart College. These students have spent their freshman year in an English-language training dormitory, and have also participated in a five-week Australian homestay program during their spring vacation. As a part of their formal studies, they also learn how to use the Internet and email. The aim of this unit is to integrate both their formal studies and English language experiences. Based on their own interests, the students are asked to read authentic materials on the Internet: they look for skim-read and take notes. They are then required to present their findings to the class. Via email to their American pen friends, they write about themselves and what they have learned from their Internet research. Finally, each student is required to write a 3~4 page report.

このプレゼンテーションは学生達にどのように英語で読む、話す、聞く、書く機会をあたえるかを試みるもので、対象は鹿児島純心短大二年生の英語科の学生達である。生活英語を鍛えるため一年次に全員寮に生活していること、またイーメールが使えることを考え合わせてこのユニットを設定している。1年生の春休みの海外でのホームステイの経験をもとに、日本とアメリカの文化の比較に焦点をあて、興味あるトピックごとにグループを作らせる。インターネットなどからのオーセンティックな情報をスキムする方法を教え、



**View PowerPoint Show**

メモを取らせまとめさせる。この段階で、クラスに英語で発表させる。質疑応答をさせ、必要ならば、もっと情報を探させる。さらに、イーメールでアメリカの学生達に、自己紹介と自分達が調べたことをもとに彼らの意見を聞く。返事がきた段階で、それをクラスで分かち合い、まだ疑問点や質問があれば、メールで質問するなど、自分達が学んだことをもとにコミュニケーションを深めていくことを目指す。最終的には、比較した英文のレポートの書き方を指導し、自分達が選んだトピックについて、3~4枚のレポートを各自提出させる。

Graduating students at the two-year women's college where I work have had rich and varied exposure and instruction in English by the end of their first year. In addition to their mostly grammar-based instruction at high school, they have had classes in practical English conversation, composition, use of computers, and cultural studies. They have had opportunity to reside with English speakers here, in Japan, and overseas. What they have lacked, until recently, is a chance to integrate these experiences in the process of preparing their graduation theses. For this purpose, I have designed a one-semester course, as part of an advanced *Academic English* class, and as part of the *Thesis Preparation Course* which each student in the school must take.

## Objectives

I set the objectives of this course as follows:

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

1. Learn how to locate interesting materials via the Internet, skim them, and take notes.
2. Make a summary report and report it orally to the whole class.
3. Listen to others, take notes and ask questions when information is not clear.
4. Write an email, send it to American people, asking for opinions on topics of interest.
5. Report the reply to the group and the whole class and discuss if necessary.
6. Write on what they have learned and the impressions they have gained through completing the unit.

Through this course, the teacher should be a facilitator in order to give students the opportunity for learning (Brown 1994: 43). As students read authentic materials on the Internet, the topics that students want to research should be the most interesting ones to them. That is why students themselves, and not the teacher, should find the material. In this way, students will take active roles in their own learning process. Moreover, when they take notes, the teacher should assign students to find the differences and similarities between two



cultures (Japanese and American) so that they can think of the reasons or factors that create the differences.

Doing this will also help students when they listen to each others' reports and take notes, because the teacher will ask them to write down the differences and the reasons for them. At the same time, the students' previous instruction on how to write a comparison and contrast paragraph can be integrated and is helpful.

Furthermore, when students get the feedback from American students, they can add the new information after the summary. In this way, the information can enrich their content. On the other hand, if students have forgotten how to write a comparative and contrastive paragraph, the teacher can review it while having students write using the information with Internet.

To achieve these objectives I endeavored to assign compelling activities that would integrate the learning objectives with the four skills: reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

### Activities

1. Students brainstorm as a whole class and form cooperative groups depending on their interest.
2. Students search for authentic materials using the Internet, read them, get the facts, and take notes. (Compare and contrast it with Japanese culture.)
3. Students can go and find reference material in the library if they cannot get enough information with

the Internet.

4. Students make a summary report as a group and rehearse it within the group.
5. Students present the report to the class, and others listen and take notes.
6. Students prepare and send email to American students on a topic of interest.
7. Students report American students' replies to the class and discuss if necessary.
8. Each student is asked to write what she has learned and thought of through the unit.

Mainly students are asked to work as a cooperative group based on their topic of interest. The teacher, as a facilitator, needs to monitor how students work. If students have difficulties searching for materials and locating them, the teacher should help them. At the same time, the teacher needs to establish contact with the American students and let them know the topics that Japanese students are preparing and going to ask in the near future. American students are high school students who are studying about different countries and want to contact with people in other countries. The teacher may also ask American students' questions in order to stimulate his/her own students' interests.

Although students might want to take time as much as possible to research their topic, class time is limited. Therefore, the teacher always needs to consider the

timeline and should be flexible in order to complete this course.

## Timeline

The main timeline of the course is as follows:

### *[Day 1]*

Students are introduced to this course and brainstorm as a whole class on what they want to study. Then they form groups depending on their interest and each student writes what they already know about the topic. After that, they brainstorm in each group to write what more they want to know about the topic.

### *[Day 2]*

Students start searching for information with the Internet. If they cannot find helpful sources on the Internet, they may go to the library to get information from books or dictionaries. Then, they skim through them and are asked to take notes as 'New Information' on their topic.

### *[Day 3]*

Students are asked to make a summary on what they have found as a group. They are also asked to write similarities and differences after the facts. Then they rehearse their report within the group.

### *[Day 4]*

Students finish preparing for their class presentations within their group and start to report to the class. The

students listening to the reporter are asked to take notes. Moreover, one student from each group is asked to complete a peer evaluation form for the reporter. For the peer evaluation, the student should give marks on the report's organization, speech attitude, and eye contact as well as writing some comments as a whole.

### *[Day 5]*

Students prepare to send two emails: The first one is to introduce themselves, and the other is to report what they have learned, and ask American students for feedback. After checking and receiving advice from the teacher, students send the mails to the U.S.A.

### *[Day 6]*

If students have received replies from the U.S.A., they are asked to share them with the whole class. They can continue corresponding by email in response to class discussion. Finally, each student is asked to write what she has learned and thought of through the class.

Although there are only 6 days to cover these steps, students will need time to search for information and make the preliminary report as well as the final report. When corresponding with American students does not work well because of the different semester timing, the teacher needs to contact with American people in Japan, such as ALT teachers or American people working in Japan. If they can come to the class, that will be very helpful. In this way, students actually have opportunities to contact with American people and speak, listen, read,



or write in English. As they already have the information to discuss, it will be a good starting point to feel that English is a tool for communication and their class will be the actual use of language for meaningful purposes (Brown 1994: 17).

### Assessment

At the beginning, students are asked to prepare a portfolio in order to put down everything they will do through the course. They will receive 20 points for it. They also get 20 points for the speaking part and 40 points for the writing part. Moreover, students also have to assess each other because it sometimes happens that one student does all the work when they work together.

### Reference

Brown, H. D. (1994). *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall Regents.

Therefore, each group has 20 points and they have to divide the points among themselves. In this way, students are expected to cooperate with each other in the work, for each of them has many opportunities to use all the skills of English.

### Conclusion

By appealing to an individual's interests and setting the goal to exchange opinions with native speakers, students will be motivated and find benefits through this course. In this way, students will have opportunities to increase their interest in other cultures and develop friendships. Then students will be able to improve their four skills in English gradually.