

## USING WEB-QUEST TECHNOLOGY IN ENGLISH LESSONS AS FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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**Annotation:** In the article were structures of using web-quest technology in English lessons as foreign language analyzed.

**Key words:** web-quest, benefit, teaching, English, foreign language, technology.

A webquest is an activity that requires learners to use the Internet in order to complete a task. Webquests can extend over an entire course, several classes or be integrated into a single lesson.

Defining a webquest Bernie Dodge of San Diego State University was one of the first people to attempt to define and structure this kind of learning activity. According to him, a webquest is *"an inquiry-oriented activity in which some or all of the information that learners interact with comes from resources on the Internet..."*

This definition has been refined over the years, and adapted for various different disciplines. Philip Benz (See Further reading) describes a webquest as follows: *"A "WebQuest" is a Constructivist approach to learning (...). Students not only collate and organize information they've found on the web, they orient their activities towards a specific goal they've been given, often associated with one or more roles modeled on adult professions."* Essentially, webquests are mini-projects in which a large percentage of the input and material is supplied by the Internet. Webquests can be teacher-made or learner-made, depending on the learning activity the teacher decides on.

Reasons for using webquests. There are many compelling reasons for using webquests in the classroom, including:

- They are an easy way for teachers to begin to incorporate the Internet into the language classroom, on both a short-term and long-term basis - no specialist technical knowledge is needed either to produce or use them.
- More often than not, they are group activities and as a result tend to lend themselves to communication and the sharing of knowledge - two principal goals of language teaching itself.
- They can be used simply as a linguistic tool, but can also be interdisciplinary, allowing for crossover into other departments and subject areas.
- They encourage critical thinking skills, including: comparing, classifying, inducing, deducing, analysing errors, constructing support, abstraction, analysing perspectives, etc. Learners are not able to simply regurgitate

information they find, but are guided towards a transformation of that information in order to achieve a given task.

- They can be both motivating and authentic tasks and encourage learners to view the activities they are doing as something 'real' or 'useful'. This inevitably leads to more effort, greater concentration and a real interest in task achievement.

Structure of a webquest: Webquests have now been around long enough for them to have a clearly defined structure. However, this structure - whilst being unofficially recognised as the definitive schema for these activities - should only really be taken as a basic guideline and you should design your webquests to suit the needs and learning styles of your students. There are usually four main sections to a webquest:

- The Introduction stage is normally used to introduce the overall theme of the webquest. It involves giving background information on the topic and, in the language learning context, often introduces key vocabulary and concepts which learners will need to understand in order to complete the tasks involved.
- The Task section of the webquest explains clearly and precisely what the learners will have to do as they work their way through the webquest. The task should obviously be highly motivating and intrinsically interesting for the learners, and should be firmly anchored in a real-life situation. This often involves the learners in a certain amount of role-play within a given scenario (e.g. you are the school social organiser and have to organise a trip for your class to an English-speaking country...)
- The Process stage of a webquest guides the learners through a set of activities and research tasks, using a set of predefined resources. These resources - in the case of a webquest - are predominately web-based, and are usually presented in clickable form within the task document (it's important to bear in mind that it's much easier to click on a link than to type it in with any degree of accuracy). In the case of a language-based webquest, the Process stage of the webquest may introduce (or recycle) lexical areas or grammatical points which are essential to the Task. The Process stage of the webquest will usually have one (or sometimes several) 'products' which the learners are expected to present at the end. These 'products' will often form the basis of the Evaluation stage.
- The Evaluation stage can involve learners in self-evaluation, comparing and contrasting what they have produced with other learners and giving feedback on what they feel they have learnt, achieved, etc. It will also involve teacher evaluation of the same, and good webquests will give guidance to the teacher for this particular part of the process.

Producing a webquest producing a webquest does not entail any detailed technical knowledge. Whilst all of the examples in the further reading are essentially web-based, it is extremely easy to produce a professional-looking and workable design using any modern word processor. The skillset for producing a webquest might be defined as follows:

- Research skills. It is essential to be able to search the Internet and quickly and accurately find resources. It is beyond the scope of this article to delve into the finer points of using search engines and subject guides, but a good reading of their respective help pages will dramatically improve the accuracy of any search.
- Analytical skills. It is also very important to be able to cast a critical eye over the resources you do find when searching. Make sure to visit any website you are considering using thoroughly before basing any activity around it.
- Word processing skills. You will also need to be able to use a word processor to combine text, images and weblinks into a finished document. This particular set of skills can be acquired in approximately ten minutes.

Before sitting down to plan a webquest, it is always worth searching around on the Internet to see if someone has produced something which might fit your needs. There are plenty of webquest 'repositories' on the Internet, so there is little point in reinventing the wheel. Use a search engine to have a good look round before you do the hard work yourself.

In the event that you have to design and produce your own webquest, Tom March (see further reading for more details) has produced a flow chart for the design process. Essentially, the following guidelines will get you started:

- Define the topic area and the 'end product' (Introduction and Task phases)
- Find web resources which are suitable content-wise and linguistically (Resources)
- Group the resources according to stages of the Task
- Structure the Process - tasks, resources, lexical areas, grammatical areas
- Design the Evaluation stages and concepts

Once these tasks have been performed, the webquest can be put together as a simple word-processed document (add images and links to all the resources learners will need) or as a webpage.

Implementing a webquest. Shorter webquests can be used to complement coursebook materials - over one or a small number of classes - whilst long-term webquests are perhaps more suited to longer courses. In breaking down a webquest for use over several class sessions, ensure that your learners are aware of what they are doing - of why they are doing it, and of the benefits to them. It's all too easy for them

not to spot the benefits and to consider regular visits to the computer lab as a waste of time. The self-evaluation proposed in the model above can go some way towards mitigating this situation. Suggested questions for learners to consider include:

- How effective was my contribution to the group work?
- What did I learn about the topics we researched?
- How did my English improve doing this project?
- What did I learn about using the Internet?

### Conclusion

However you decide to work with webquests, you should find that well-chosen and motivating topics, coupled with up-to-date websites and access to the wealth of material on the Internet will provide lively, interesting and learning-rich classes for you and your learners.

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