

Resources on the Web

Teachers always ask what kind of internet-based materials they should use for ESL and EFL students. There is certainly no shortage of materials on the Internet, but identifying those materials that are most reliable, appropriate and beneficial is important. The next few issues of this column will deal with identifying outstanding resources by skill area. This issue provides a list of some of the more impressive listening resources on the web.

How do I get started?

First, it is important to prepare your computers for the kind of materials that you will use. Since there are a variety of audio and video file types, you will need to identify the player required for your particular resources. Some of the most common of these include Realplayer®, QuickTime and Windows Media Player. However, many forms of media require Shockwave or other browser plug-ins. If you intend to employ a variety of listening materials it may be best to have one of each of the following players installed. All of these players are free to download and you may find that many are already installed on your computer.

Why not rely on my cassette library?

While there is certainly no reason to abandon your cassette library altogether, web-based listening allows instructors to enhance the learning experience by utilizing or incorporating a wide range of support and extra-linguistic material. Whether linked or embedded directly into the same page, additional sounds, pictures, videos and text can all help to enrich the listening experience. Quizzes and activities can also be connected in this immediate manner. While creative teachers should be encouraged to explore the endless possibilities, those who are not so inclined can find a wealth of materials already available online.

So many choices

This list is by no means exhaustive. In fact, I could add hundreds of other sites if I wanted to be as thorough as possible. I have chosen a handful of extremely useful sites based on three important criteria: price (all are free), amount of content (all are extensive) and quality of materials (all have extremely high standards).

Randall's ESL Cyber Listening Lab (<http://www.esl-lab.com>). This is a free site run by Randall Davis. Randall is not only a provider of great ESL listening resources, but also a very friendly person. This friendly demeanor is evident in the materials on this site. Many are playful and fun. Randall's site contains sound files arranged into four categories: general listening, academic listening, long conversations with video, and short exercises. They are further divided into levels within these categories, ranging from easy to very difficult. Each lesson has pre- and post-listening exercises, including quizzes with immediate and detailed feedback. Transcripts are also available with vocabulary glossed. Requires Realplayer®.

California Distance Learning Project - <http://www.cdlponline.org/news.html>. This is a great resource for lower level students. Elementary new stories are presented in audio and video with an extensive amount of instructional material to support them. Skills addressed in the lessons include vocabulary building, recognizing sequencing and identifying conclusions. Quizzes and an open response forum (show and tell) are also available for each of the audio and/or video recordings. Transcripts and outlines of the stories are available. Requires Realplayer®.

A variety of news sources

National Public Radio (<http://www.npr.org>) provides archive and current audio with textual support and thoughtfully selected web-links that provide additional schema building. **The British Broadcasting Company** (<http://www.bbc.com>) also provides similar resources with additional textual support in 43 different languages.

Cable News Network (<http://www.cnn.com>) has current and archived news available in both audio and video formats. They also provide transcripts and quizzes for some of their materials. While registration may be required to access some of the material on their site, it is currently a free practice. **The Public Broadcasting Service** (<http://pbs.org>) has very similar resources to CNN with an added feature of allowing teachers to register for updates and the ability to design customized content for classes (these features cater to the K-12 community, but nearly all of the materials intended for high school students are appropriate for my university level international graduate students).

This list only scratches the surface of materials that exist on the web for ESL/EFL listening purposes. For more information regarding listening resources on the Web, as well as their implementation, surf to the support page for the colloquium “Technology, Techniques, and Materials for Web Listening” at: <http://www.stanford.edu/~efs/tesol03listening/>