languages ICT

Technology for languages • Focus on authoring software

Matching pictures to text
Depending on the software you use, pupils can engage in a range of activities matching picture to text, for example, a pelmanism activity where pupils click on numbered squares to reveal either text or a picture. If they make a correct match between text and picture, the squares remain uncovered and they gain points. Otherwise, the text and image are covered once more and pupils have to continue trying to make correct matches. This activity develops memory, helps pupils to associate image and text and is especially advantageous for consolidation work. Activities such as this can sometimes be set against the clock, demanding concentration and speed of response.

Matching text to text
Much authoring software allows you to set up text-to-text matching activities. As well as linking English to the target language, pupils can be asked to match two elements of the target language. For example, they could do a drag-and-drop exercise to match subjects to verb phrases. More advanced pupils might match synonyms or antonyms. Take care to ensure that each element only has one possible match. Audio clips could also be matched to one another or to text or picture.

Gap-fill exercises
With common authoring software, you can write your own text or copy and paste from another source into the application. You can blank out words for pupils to reconstruct, either from a list supplied or by using context. You can often link the text manipulation activity to pictures or an audio or video file. Alternatively, pupils may be able to use game formats to reconstruct the text. In one instance, text is broken into chunks and displayed on tiles, which must be re-ordered so that the entire text reads correctly. This encourages pupils to think about the structure of text overall, rather than focusing on single words.

Reconstructing dialogues
Reconstructing dialogues using authoring software can support role-play or conversation activities. Pupils are obliged to concentrate on meaning and to make appropriate grammatical changes as the dialogue moves from one person to another. As questions become answers, it may be necessary to switch person in the verb, to switch tense, or to change a possessive adjective. Pupils can choose the way they prefer to reconstruct a dialogue. At perhaps the hardest level, they can 'predict' the whole dialogue, working just from punctuation markers as guidance. Alternatively, they can opt for unscrambling or unjumbling words, filling in spaces appropriately or finishing lines, the first half being given. Reconstruction activities could also be designed using audio clips or even video clips.

Interactive crosswords
Crosswords are a versatile and appealing way of practising various aspects of language. You type in the list of words to be used and the software automatically includes as many as possible in the crossword grid. You then add the clues, which might be a vocabulary translation, a target language clue or a word definition, or a grammatical task such as a verb or tense conjugation. You can include pictures or sound clips as clues. Pupils enjoy the challenge of the crossword, while focusing carefully on the language to be practised.

Word-ordering exercises
Many authoring packages allow you to break sentences into individual words or sections, which pupils have to rebuild in the correct order. This can be useful in many contexts, such as putting negatives or adjectives in the correct place, or rearranging different components of the sentence into the correct grammatical position. At an advanced level, you might provide pupils with a sentence in the active voice and a list of jumbled words, from which they must recreate a sentence in the passive voice. At a basic level, supply a series of pictures – or maybe even sounds – and ask pupils to put the words into the same order.

Manipulating verb endings

This is a difficult area of language for many learners, but authoring packages offer a range of stimulating activities, both for whole-class and independent work. For example, subject pronouns and infinitives can flash up on a screen or whiteboard with animation effects, prompting pupils to conjugate the verbs they see. Alternatively, pupils can match subjects to their correct verb form. If you do this on an interactive whiteboard, you can set the class into competing teams, with representatives coming to the board and, perhaps, working against the clock. For independent work, you can create gap-fill activities, where pupils complete verb endings at their own pace.

Reading comprehension

Authoring software allows you to create interactive reading comprehension tasks, such as True/False activities or multiple-choice questions. You can also ask the pupils to select certain words from the text to answer a simple question or to complete a sentence. More able pupils can manipulate language in the text to fit answer sentences. For example, a pupil might be expected to write 'There was a growth in …,' if the text says 'The number of tourists grew last year.' You can base the activities on a text you write yourself or, for more advanced pupils, an authentic text from the Internet (subject to copyright). Alternatively, you could base questions on a picture rather than a text, or on a short section of audio to develop listening skills.

Spelling activities

Once you have entered a list of words, authoring software can create games for practising spelling words. For example, a game where pupils click on letter tiles in the correct order to recreate a word based on its English translation. One authoring product offers a game where pupils follow links around a spider's web in the correct order to spell a word.

Multiple-choice quizzes

Pupils enjoy doing quizzes and you can create your own in a variety of formats and language levels. You can supply a picture and ask beginners to choose the correct word to describe it. You might use a quiz to practise a grammar point with intermediate learners, where they choose the correct verb, adjective or word from those given to complete a sentence accurately. At an advanced level, you could use a quiz to revise a literature topic, for example, where pupils answer multiple-choice questions about characters, or identify who said an important quote. You could also include a video or audio clip and add your own comprehension questions.

Examples of authoring software

Gamesbox	**www.usablesoftwarecompany.com**
Hot Potatoes	**http://web.uvic.ca/hrd/hotpot**
Fun with Texts	**www.camsoftpartners.co.uk**
TaskMagic	**www.taskmagic.co.uk**
TexToys	**www.cict.co.uk/software/textoys/examples**
SpellMaster	**www.spellmaster.com**
Wida Software	**www.wida.co.uk**

To read about tried and tested ideas for using authoring software, try searching the *Useful ICT ideas, effective language lessons* database on the Languages ICT website (**www.languages-ict.org.uk**).

Note: Reference to specific products does not imply endorsement by CILT, the National Centre for Languages nor ALL.

www.languages-ict.org.uk