

# languages ICT



## What are authoring tools for MFL?

Authoring software allows teachers to build interactive exercises specifically to meet the needs of pupils. Depending on the software, activities can be run from the school network or be web-based. A key feature of authoring software is that learners receive immediate feedback. A wide range of activities can be created, for consolidation of vocabulary, to reinforce grammatical points, or to develop reading and listening skills. While authored activities generally promote independent learning they can also be used with an interactive whiteboard for whole class teaching.



Authoring tools are used to build interactive exercises which can be stored on a network or hosted on the Internet. Materials stored on the school network or on the Internet can, of course, be used for whole class teaching with an interactive whiteboard. The interactive board, when used for whole class work, lends itself perfectly to many authored activities. Pupils can be organised into teams and representatives come to the front to use the board's interactive facilities. They can move words, phrases or images in matching activities, write when filling gaps and drag and drop when re-constructing texts. Pupils can work independently on networked activities in the computer room and, from home, can use interactive materials stored on the World Wide Web or the school network if available.



### Creating activities

Authoring software, being free of content, enables teachers to create tailor-made activities to suit individual classes or groups. Sequences of activities can be made to meet the differing needs, abilities and speeds of pupils. A wide range of activities are available for creation and some, depending on the software, work like computer games, with which many pupils will be familiar. Activities include the following types:

- Text matching
- Gap fill
- Re-ordering the letters of a word
- Reconstruction of a sentence or sequence of sentences
- Crosswords, puzzles, hangman, wordsearches, memory games, noughts and crosses etc.
- Quizzes
- Picture and sound matching
- Picture and text matching
- Sound to sound matching
- Multiple choice
- Dialogue completion

The attraction of authoring software is that non-programmers can create stimulating activities quickly and easily. Input is not restricted to text: sound, image and even video can be included, thus generating a multimedia learning experience. The design interface is such that the teacher-creator merely has to select an activity type and input the specific language, or link to the appropriate sound file, for the preferred activity. The programme creates the activity, which can then be stored on the network in a shared area for ease of access or printed. Pupils too can print completed activities to keep as a record.

### Limitations

Activities created with authoring software are generally constructed around the element of choice: a pupil chooses a correct answer or submits a correct word or letter which the computer then marks as right or wrong. This format permits the computer to give pupils a score, thus providing instant feedback and motivation to return to the same work in an attempt to improve the score. However, more creative language work is not suitable for this format as it is too difficult to predict what language a pupil will generate, which precludes the teacher from inputting a sole correct answer.

It is important to bear in mind the limitations of authoring software in this regard and to consider the place of interactive exercises within a scheme of work or sequence of activities. They are very useful for practice and consolidation, for developing reading or listening skills and for developing skills of interpretation or inference. Clearly, much depends on the quality of the material that is used for exercises and the ways in which the teacher uses it. However, the potential is there to design demanding tasks which, while operating on the principle of correct/incorrect answer, nonetheless develop language skills and build confidence in the pupil.

In particular, re-ordering or re-constructing small paragraphs or dialogues calls upon the pupil to identify language markers and respond accordingly. For example, an adverb of time, such as the French “hier” will indicate the need for a verb in a past tense. Using contextual clues, a pupil will infer that a gap before a verb in Spanish, clearly referring to a person previously mentioned, may require a subject or object pronoun. The longer the series of sentences to be reconstructed and re-ordered, the greater the demand is on the learner to demonstrate understanding and correct inference.

Activities such as these can be very challenging, but, in common with simpler exercises, a hint or clue can often be included to help a learner and a quick link to a correct version should be made available. At all points, interactive authored materials can provide support, feedback, stimulation and challenge. Used judiciously, authored interactive exercises can be key elements in a coherent pedagogical sequence which takes the learner from teacher input to individual practice and then to freer creation built on work completed.

### Access

Proprietary authoring software, such as [Fun with Texts](http://www.camsoftpartners.co.uk/fwt.htm) (www.camsoftpartners.co.uk/fwt.htm) or [Task Magic](http://www.mdlsoft.co.uk/) (www.mdlsoft.co.uk/), does not require you to run interactive materials in a web browser, online or offline. However, online interactive materials are also available for those who wish to use a browser to deliver materials. Being based on the World Wide Web, materials can be accessed by any computer with a web browser, in school or at home. Additionally, many of the online activities are designed by practising teachers and have been tried and tested already with pupils. They are easy-to-use, easy to access and, as contributors are constantly adding resources, they provide an ever-varying range of valid activities. It is even possible, in some cases, to store pupils' results online or create class pages listing work for particular classes to complete.

Some providers of web-based interactive exercises, such as [Quia](http://www.quia.com/) (www.quia.com/) or [Linguascope 9](http://www.linguascope.co.uk/) (www.linguascope.co.uk/), require a subscription to enjoy the full range of benefits, which may include full use of shared resources, software and guidance on creating your own materials and access for pupils. [TexToys](http://www.cict.co.uk/software/texttoys/index.htm) (www.cict.co.uk/software/texttoys/index.htm) offers web hosting for activities if desired. [Hot Potatoes](http://web.uvic.ca/hrd/halfbaked/) (http://web.uvic.ca/hrd/halfbaked/) enables the teacher to create web-based interactive materials and is free so long as any activities created are made available on the Web.

Some schools have created a wide range of online activities, which are available via their school website. See, for example, [Ashcombe School](http://www.ashcombe.surrey.sch.uk/Curriculum/modlang/index.htm) (www.ashcombe.surrey.sch.uk/Curriculum/modlang/index.htm) or [Languages Online](http://atschool.eduweb.co.uk/rgshiwyc/school/curric/HotPotatoes/) (http://atschool.eduweb.co.uk/rgshiwyc/school/curric/HotPotatoes/) at the Royal Grammar School, High Wycombe.

*To read about tried and tested ideas for using online notice boards, try searching the Useful ICT ideas, effective language lessons database on the Languages ICT website.*

*Note: Information in this booklet has been collated by a number of practising teachers and advisers and is accurate to the best of our knowledge at the time of writing. CILT and ALL do not take any responsibility for inaccuracies contained within. The inclusion of any software products and/or companies within Languages ICT guidance does not imply endorsement by CILT or ALL in any way.*