

Using Microsoft Word to Generate Computerized Tests

Frank Tuzi

[ftuzi \[at\] nrm.root.or.jp](mailto:ftuzi@nrm.root.or.jp)

<http://www.root.or.jp/ftuzi/>

Tokyo Christian University, Japan

Introduction

Language learning requires many hours of practice time. On average 2500 hours is required for a student to achieve an intermediate level of proficiency in a second language (Omaggio, 21) . If a student desires to achieve this level of proficiency in the four years they attend college, they will be required to study approximately two hours everyday. That is fourteen hours a week and sixty-one hours a month.

Since the number of study hours is so extensive, many language programs cannot provide all the hours necessary to reach an intermediate level of English. However, there are other ways to satisfy the study hours these students require. One way to assist in meeting this need for more practice is automation. In other words, teachers can help students practice through computerized practice activities and online testing. There are a number of benefits for computerized materials. One of the most obvious benefits is that students can practice in or out of class. They can practice anytime they desire provided they have computer access. In addition to versatility, students can receive immediate feedback from computerized practice materials since they are computerized. Furthermore, using computerized materials allows students to work at their own pace. Student can be discouraged when the class materials don't address their specific needs. At the same time it is frustrating for a teacher to manage a class containing students with markedly different levels. But computerized practice materials provides the students an opportunity to practice with their specific weaknesses at their own pace.

Although there are many benefits to using computerized materials, there are some possible drawbacks too. Possible drawbacks to computerized materials are cost and time. The better online testing programs like Question Mark Designer are quite expensive (Question Mark Computing, 1997) . Although there are some relatively inexpensive online testing programs, they are not ideal. All of the software packages that I have tested work about the same. The teacher must input all of the materials into the program, question by question. Many seasoned teachers have a plethora of teaching materials saved on their computers; however, these materials cannot be transferred to the testing program. In other words, the teacher must re-input the data that they already input into a word processor. This is time consuming. Wouldn't be nice if there was a program that could create computerized materials directly from a word processor? Another problem with commercially made programs is that the data teachers input is not accessible to other programs. For example, if I create a test in a testing program like Quiz Master(Ez Use, 1997) , I cannot take that test and input into a word processor. So I cannot combine or transfer the data. Transferability is a must with programs, but many testing programs lack this feature.

Some computerized quiz centers are located on the Internet (Mello, 1997) . Although taking quizzes while connected to the Internet is motivating, there are also some drawbacks. Mello mentions four possible problems with Internet based quizzes.

1. The necessity of having an Internet account to be able to access the information.
2. The problems of the Internet itself, that is, the connection is sometimes slow or down.
3. The students have to keep their own score as they check their right and wrong answers against the correct answers given.
4. The students do not know how much time they spent on each quiz, allowing them to better judge their performance.

Using computerized tests off the Internet can eliminate all of these problems. Computerized testing materials can also save time and money and at the same time provide for students individual needs. Furthermore, teachers can lessen their frustration by instructing students to concentrate on strengthening their individual weaknesses via computerized materials.

Having looked at a number of online testing programs, I believe that most of these functions are possible inside the Microsoft (MS) Word environment. In other words, MS Word has all the tools necessary to produce computerized practice and testing materials. In

the remainder of this article I will explain some ways to use these tools.

Procedure

The basic tools in creating online materials are *macros* and *forms*. A macro is a series of commands which are performed automatically. For more information about macros, please look at the Alternatives section of this paper. A form is a special gizmo that is inserted into a document. They contain options for a user to select. For example, a teacher has a short reading piece and some multiple choice questions after the reading. One question is

Who is the main character? A) Mickey B) Minney C) Donald D) Pluto

Instead of writing four choices for the students to select or mark on a paper, insert a Drop-down form. When students select this form on the computer screen, they will see a drop down box with all of the options. They select the correct answer and go to the next question. Thus, forms take the place of all major question formats: true false, multiple choice, fill in the blank, etc.

With these two tools, teachers can create online materials that students can use to practice.

Creating Online Practice Materials

The first step in making online activities is to select the materials to be converted. As was mentioned earlier, many teachers have practice materials which they made in a word processor. Instead of using them in class or for homework, teachers can convert these materials to online activities which students can use to suit their individual needs. Modern word processors have converters which transfer materials from one word processor to another. If there are no materials which can be converted to MS Word, then teachers will have to spend the time inputting the materials. These teachers will not save time with this system but they will benefit by saving money and retaining versatility. In either case, open MS Word and select the materials to be used.

Next select View from the menu bar. Then select Toolbars, and check Forms toolbar from the pull down menu, and press OK. The Forms Toolbar appears.



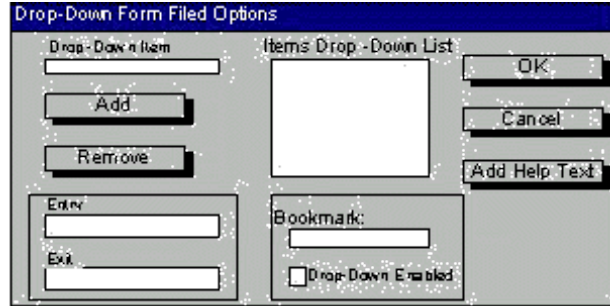
It contains eight buttons. Row one buttons are Textbox, Check Box , Dropdown box, and Form Options. Row two buttons are Table, Frame, Shade and Lock. The text button allows students to fill in the blank, and the dropdown button lets them select from a list of possible answers, i.e. multiple choice. When the online form is completed press the lock button to prevent students from modifying the form.

Now that the materials are loaded and the form toolbar is open, begin inserting forms where students will make options or fill in blanks. For example, in the following sentence students find and fix the errors.

1. **A** Letters on **a** table in the kitchen are from **a** America.

To make this an online form, simply replace the mistakes with dropdown forms.

Select the first mistake (A) and then press the dropdown button. The A is replaced with a gray area. Double click on the gray area and the options form appears.



Add the answer and distracters in the Item drop-down list. When you finish adding the items and distracters, press OK. Follow the same procedure for the second error. When all three bookmarks are finished, the sentence will look like this:

1. letters on table in the kitchen are from America.

For fill in the blank items, select the item to be replaced and insert a Text form. For example, the following sentence contains a blank. Students fill in the blank with the correct word.

1. What are you _____ ? I am _____ history.

To make this an online form, simply replace the blanks with Text forms.

Select the first blank and then press the Text button. The underline is replaced with a gray area. Double click in the gray area and input an indicator word such as "NAME" or "VERB" in all capital letters in the "Default Text" box. In this example type "DO" as the default text. Next press the "add help text" button. Type some instructions on how to answer this question in the "Type your own" section. For example, type, "Type the correct form of the verb. Spelling is important."

Then press OK two times. Do the same thing for the second blank. Insert "STUDY" in the "Default Text" box. When both forms are finished, the sentence will look like this:

1. What are you ? I am the history.

All student needs to do to fill in this "blank" is to click in or tab to the gray area and type the correct word form.

Continue adding forms to replace the items students will select or fill in. After you have completed adding all the forms, lock the form by pressing on the lock button on the "Forms" toolbar. Now that the online document is locked, the text cannot be modified. Select File, Save As from the pull down menu. Change the "Save as Type" to "Template", give the file a name and press OK.

Students can now access this template whenever they want to by opening MS Word, selecting File, New from the pull-down menu, and selecting the template. The online form will open up and the students can begin to answer the questions. After they finish the online form, they can print it out and hand it in to the teacher for correction, or teachers can create a macro to auto correct the exercises.

Creating an online activity does not take long. A typical practice sheet with 30 question takes about 15 minutes to create. For teachers with more time and interest in providing more assistance, MS Word also allows users to insert help texts into every form. See figure # 2

Precautions

Make sure that the Forms toolbar is not visible when students do these online forms. If it is visible, a student can unlock the form and mess up the text. Also, when using drop-down forms, it is important verify that only one answer can possibly be correct.

Alternatives

For people who are more adventurous, a number of automatic features can be added to these online forms by using macros. As was

mentioned earlier, a macro is a series of commands which are performed automatically. A user first makes a macro for a particular set of commands and from then on never has to them again. Instead of pressing all of the commands, they simply activate the macro and the macro performs the commands. For example. When writing a letter, I usually place the date on the right margin, and then begin the letter on the next line from the left margin. Now it is possible for me to perform these tasks by myself. I would need to:

1. Press the Right Justified button on the toolbar
2. Select Insert, Date, Option from the pull down menu
3. Press Enter
4. Press the left justified button on the menu toolbar

But if I make a macro, the macro will do everything for me. To make this macro:

1. Select Tools, Macro from the pull down menu
2. Enter 'Date' in the macro name area
3. Press Record, and Assign the macro to the keyboard
4. Select a short cut key (Like CTRL + Shift + D) and assign
5. Record the Macro and then stop recording

To record the macro, simply perform the task by yourself. Once the Macro is recorded, it can be used over and over again. To activate the macro, select Tools, Macro from the from the pull down menu, select the 'date' macro and run. If you want to use the short cut, press CTRL + Shift + D.

A macro in a practice online form can automate procedures, such as:

- Printing a form
- Checking the form to see how many answers a student got correct
- Inserting sound bytes
- converting the online form to an online test
- Sending the answers of a test to a separate file to record the grade

Using a Macro in an Online Form

Incorporating a macro into an online form is a simple process. The steps are 1) add a form, 2) make a macro, and 3) connect the macro to the form. For example, I want to allow students to automatically print the online form when they finish answering all of the questions.

Now the first step is to add a Check Box form at the bottom of the online form. Move the cursor to the bottom of the document and press the "Check Box" button on the "Forms" toolbar. Beside the checkbox type the word print. I would probably add a line separating the online form for the automation buttons.

After making the Checkbox, begin making a print macro. Select Tools, Macro from the pull down menu. Enter "Print" in the macro name area, and press Record. Don't assign the macro to anything. Now the macro is in the record mode and will record any buttons you push. The Macro Record toolbar also becomes visible. Press the print button on the toolbar, and then press the stop button on Macro Record tool bar. Now the macro is recorded.

The final step is to connect the macro to the check box. Double click on the check box. Click in the "Entry" box. The print macro that was previously created appears in the window. Select "Print", and press OK.

Now that the macro is connected to the check box, lock the online form and save it. When a student opens this practice sheet, they can automatically print it. They don't have to understand how to operate MS Word because the macro does it automatically.

To check the answers requires a macro that is created and not recorded, and creating a macro requires some knowledge of Word Basic or Visual Basic.

There is a macro available that allows teachers to add a check answers macro and a print macro to any practice document. There is

also a macro to create CLOZE exercises and C Tests. The download location is <http://www.root.or.jp/fltuzi/resource.htm>.

Conclusion

Using MS Word is a fast, easy and inexpensive way to create online practice materials and tests. The process of making online materials includes: selecting materials to use in an online form, opening the forms toolbar, replacing text with either text forms or drop-down forms, locking the online form and saving it as a new template. For schools who already have a copy of MS Word, there is no cost. Using the above outlined procedures, schools can have an almost unlimited amount of practice materials for students to use and learn from at their own pace and during their own free time.

References

Backer, Jimmy. (1995) *Teaching Grammar With Call Survey Of Theoretical Literature*. IETN.

Carrier, Michael. (1997) . *ELT Online: The Rise of the Internet*. ELT Journal vol. 51/3, Oxford University Press.

Omaggio, Alice C.(1986) *Teaching Language in Context. Proficiency-Oriented Instruction*. Heinle and Heinle Publishers. Boston, MA.

Mello, Vera. (1997) . *Online Quizzes - Are they Worthwhile?* <http://iteslj.org/Articles/Mello-Quizzes.html>, The Internet TESL Journal, vol. 3/7

Question Mark Computing. (1997) Question Mark Designer for windows <http://www.qmark.com>

EZ Use Software. (1994) *Quiz Master*. 4732 Knollpark Circle, Antioch, CA 944509

The Internet TESL Journal, Vol. III, No. 11, November 1997

<http://iteslj.org/>

<http://iteslj.org/Articles/Tuzi-Tests/>