

A Simulation for Business English Students

A Six-Unit Course

Heather Hanson

Trident School of Languages (Nagoya, Japan)

[tridentl\[at\]mb.nagoya.infoweb.or.jp](mailto:tridentl[at]mb.nagoya.infoweb.or.jp)

(Subject line should be "Heather Hanson")

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Introduction

Do you think these products would sell?

- CATCHMAN - a radar to locate lost children
- QUICK DRY - dries wet umbrellas before entering post office, department stores, etc.
- SEASONAL HAIR - a tonic to encourage hair growth for balding men
- PASH - just push for toothbrush and toothpaste in one
- RAINBOW CAP - colorful cap for kids with retractable rain poncho
- SECOND SMILE - a stylish face mask for when you get allergies

Students in my Business English class dreamed up these ideas, gave the products names, slogans and descriptions, and designed radio, television and/or magazine advertising. How can you get your students to imagine that they are entrepreneurs and be creative using business vocabulary and concepts? It's easy, whether this is your students' first exposure to business English or if you want to use this project with a group who has a business background.

Course Objectives:

1. Interact with Authentic Materials to Learn and Apply the Business Concepts
2. Use Spoken/Written English in the Advertising Design
3. Use Spoken/Written English in the Final Mock Trade Fair, or EXPO

Overview of Project:

1. Business concepts introduced through authentic materials and modeling
2. Students work in groups, teacher assists them as coach
3. Students use their creativity to design a new product, name it, describe it, etc.
4. Students come up with an advertising image, slogan and advertising media
5. Students enjoy being creative and artistic as they prepare the product and advertising
6. All of this is done in preparation for a mock trade fair, or EXPO, in which students show off their products to each other and evaluate each other

Background

This project was designed for a class that is offered one time a week for 15 weeks for 90 minutes per class. This project has been successful with six groups of about twenty students each. Most students had not had any previous business English classes. The project comprises the last six lessons of the semester.

The class textbook is Meeting Objectives, a text/video series from Oxford University Press.

A brief description of description of six, 90-minute lesson plans follows. Corresponding handouts can be obtained by e-mailing the author.

The Lessons

Class I - SELLING SOAP

Students first use the video and textbook: Chapter 4, Meetings. The video shows a board meeting discussion about the launching of a new bar of soap. A humorous debate ensues about what the name and advertising for the bar of soap should be. After the students reinforce these concepts through text activities, students make groups and imagine that they are selling another new soap. Each group is asked to do a rough sketch of their product, and to list some other details. For example, they can decide the product name, price, colors, scents, packaging, etc. This is done in a fun, unstructured way without specific guidelines. Each group chooses a representative to show their illustration to the class.

Class II - DOGGIE DIAPER USED TO INTRODUCE PROJECT

In the next class, the teacher introduces new product design, advertising and EXPO as a long-term project. Students choose their groups, and are given a Product Design Agenda by which to guide them through the stages of the project. It is useful for both teachers and students if this Agenda is used throughout the project as a record of each team's progress.

Then, two native speakers model the process for brainstorming new product ideas, and comparing the pro's and con's of appropriate advertising media. During this simulation, students act as "teachers" and evaluate the so-called "students" using a checklist. Teamwork and creativity are on the Grading Checklist, as well as whatever else you want to reinforce as criteria.

At Trident, the two teachers perform an original skit for both classes about brainstorming product ideas and finally promoting a "doggie diaper." Joining classes is possible since the two teachers are always scheduled in the same time slot.

Students then return to their original classrooms and their groups to start their own brainstorming process, spurred on by the innovative ideas which the native speakers just presented. The teacher circulates and helps when needed, and also reminds students to write notes on their Project Design Agenda.

Class III - TOM HANKS LEADS THE WAY TO MORE GROUP WORK

From this third meeting until the sixth meeting, the majority of class is spent on group work with teacher supervision as needed. But how does the teacher keep the students from loosing steam? How do we keep these new business concepts fresh in their minds? Continuing to use authentic materials materials to introduce each class is the answer.

An amusing four-minute segment from the film "Nothing in Common" shows an advertising team developing a marketing proposal for an airline company. Students answer questions about advertising image, slogan, and target market, and discuss the answers as a class. As well, storyboards are used as a mock television commercial in the movie. This provides a springboard for discussion even more advertising methods with students. At Trident, we give students the option to do radio ads, magazine ads, storyboards or videos, or ads for the school newsletter.

At this point, we also introduce a Grading Criteria Checklist. To earn an A, students have to produce two types of advertising and a scale model or packaging model in a satisfactory fashion. To get a B, students should complete two of the above, and so on. Thus, each group can opt for what

grade they want based on how much work they attempt.

The rest of the class is left for the students to work in groups, and for the teacher to facilitate as needed.

Class IV - MAGAZINE AD MANIA AND GROUP WORK

Like the previous class, authentic materials are used to boost students' creativity and interest, and to recycle the target vocabulary. This time, many magazine ads are put around the room and students use a worksheet to answer questions about the ads which they find most interesting. Then, the class as a whole discusses the magazine ads and compares their effectiveness. Group work follows.

Class V - INTRODUCE EXPO TASK SHEET AND GROUP WORK

Luckily, the students at Trident are very clear on the business concepts at this point. They are heavily into the creative process, and need no prodding to get to work in their groups. Their only requests are for more markers, construction paper, poster paper, scissors, etc. Students absorbed in the creative process is a beautiful thing to watch, isn't it?

However, the teacher does need time to go into more detail about the events planned for EXPO day. Students are asked to dress professionally. Students are encouraged to make the best presentation possible, for their teachers and for the other students. As well, the teacher tells the students that a questionnaire, or Task Sheet, will also be used during the EXPO. This Task Sheet is used at the EXPO to encourage students to interact with each other in English to learn about each product's slogan, image, target market, etc.

Class VI - EXPO DAY

EXPO day has arrived! It is most effective if you can schedule for two Business English classes to join in one room. If not, you might invite another English class and/or other teachers to give the students an audience for their exhibits.

During set-up time, each group chooses an area of the room for their product's presentation display. Posters need to be put on the wall, and cassette players and videos need to be set up. We've even had students bring table cloths and candies to entice people to visit their booths . . . real sales people, eh?

Next, each group is given a few minutes to give an overview of their product and their advertising. This can be done informally, without specific criteria given by the teacher, or could be an added "oral presentation" component of teaching and grading. Natural pride in their work comes out, as students showed their story boards, radio ads, posters, videos, etc. The whole room listens attentively, as students have a natural curiosity in each others' projects.

Next, it is time to get the students to interact in English using the Task Sheet. Each student in the room is responsible for filling out his/her own sheet. Within each group, students must take turns so that each member of the team has an opportunity to visit other exhibits and fill out the sheet, while at least one member stays at the booth to answer questions from visitors.

Conclusion

EXPOs at Trident have been a success with all six groups that have tried it. Students have shown innovative products, most groups have created the number of materials to earn an A, spoken English has been used during the entirety of the EXPO, and student's Task Sheets have clearly showed their knowledge of the target vocabulary .

One drawback is that during group work, students generally speak in Japanese. My students don't have the English ability to negotiate tasks and make decisions in English. However, the students do use English to complete the Product Agenda Sheet, which should be used to take notes on every class. Just a glance at this, and the teacher can ask questions and make suggestions about the project, and get the students to respond in English. As well, students may need to describe and request materials they need to create their advertising. So long as the teacher is helpful and encouraging, this group work time can be used for student - teacher communication in English.

Good luck in preparing your students for a new product EXPO. Please e-mail if you have any comments or questions.

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