

# Watching Movie Trailers in the ESL Class

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The importance of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) in today's ESL/EFL classes cannot be understated. However, finding specific sites to use in class can be a delicate process. This paper outlines the techniques that can be used in class with a movie trailers website.

## Introduction

Computer-based language teaching (or Computer Assisted Language Learning-CALL) has become widely popular in recent years. In fact, a review of most language journals written lately demonstrates that CALL has dominated the discussion on language teaching. Using computers for teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language (ESL or EFL) has been delineated at length in the literature in recent years. ESL and EFL teachers seem to be well aware of the need for CALL in today's language classrooms (Edwards, 2002).

The Internet has become a very powerful tool in language teaching, and most teachers are (or should be) keenly aware of the need to use it in the classroom. Proof of this exists in the research of Cummins (1998), who noted that using computers give students a wide range of learning options. Bicknell (1999) stated that using the Internet and its applications act as a motivational apparatus which gives students the chance to use all four language skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening) whilst having the added bonus of fostering computer literacy. However, despite the common feeling that teachers should be incorporating CALL into their classrooms, many teachers are still reticent to do so. This may be due in part to any of the following factors: teachers' and students' own limited computer skills; a lack of typing skills; a general fear of computers and the difficulty in learning how to correctly use them; or the lack of adequate facilities in schools. This last point causes obvious problems to those who do not have access to a room full of computers with the appropriate tools for listening (headphones) and high-speed Internet connections.

The Internet also allows students to connect with each other in ways they normally would not be able to do. Web-based activities such as message boards, chat rooms, email, and discussion groups provide ESL and EFL learners with a healthy forum in which to communicate with others. In fact, Healy (2000) noted that the above activities give learners a "direct and immediate communication between peers while using genuine language". Warschauer's study (1997) noted greater participation by so-called "shy" students when using the Internet as a language-learning tool. These are no doubt important elements of language learning; points that teachers need to be aware of in their classes. Bearing this in mind, this paper aims to set out a clear and useful use for one such web-based activity that allows learners of English as a Second or Foreign Language to broaden their horizons while using genuine language, which is clearly a critical element of all CALL. The activities outlined here are unique in that they allow learners to interface with a computer, all the while gathering useful information that will help them learn English.

The use of films in ESL and EFL classes has been a popular method of teaching for many years. However, how useful are films if they are not clearly understood by our students? Naturally, watching full-length films is not always the best way to spend classroom time with our students. So, while searching for better ways to bring Hollywood to the classroom, I stumbled upon a great site that presents movie clips, or trailers that ended up being very beneficial in my CALL classroom.

## Specifics of the Site

The objectives of the lesson were twofold: to enhance student knowledge of the capabilities of the Internet through the use of movie trailers; and the use of movie trailers as an educational tool for improving students' understanding of spoken English. The site discussed here can be found at <http://www.apple.com/trailers/>, and is updated with new additions to its archives very regularly. The site is presented in an easy manner with eight "main" movies appearing at the top of the screen in picture form that can be accessed by clicking on the picture. The rest of the site is divided into the different companies that distribute films (mostly in the United States). There are well over 100 movie trailers on the site at any given time, and they can be accessed by simply clicking on the title of the

film. Most of them are new releases or upcoming movies. In fact, some trailers appear on the site up to six months before their release date. After the viewer clicks on the film of his or her choice, some basic information about the film appears, such as the director, cast, genre and the web address of the official movie site. The viewer can then watch the trailer by choosing the size (small, medium or large) that he or she wants. Since the trailers are anywhere from one minute to two-and-a-half minutes in length, students tend to focus their skills on comprehension to get the most out of the exercise.

## Setting the Lesson Up

Doing the lesson obviously requires access to a computer lab. As stated in the introduction, one of the main impediments to doing this lesson will be the lack of equipment at some facilities. For the lesson to work best, a high-speed Internet connection is needed (especially for large classes, as the nature of the site means it will inevitably be slower with heavy traffic), as are headphones and the *Apple Quicktime Plugin* software. Most newer computers should be already equipped with this software, but a glance through your school's system will help before attempting to do this lesson. The trailers are suitable for students of all ages, and there is no offensive language or images included in the trailers.

## Pre-viewing Activity

To start, a conversation of the types of films students enjoy watching is a beneficial activity to get them thinking about movies in general. Most ESL/EFL learners tend to enjoy watching movies, but watching them without the subtitles of their native language can be a challenging task. Therefore, teaching some basic concepts before watching the trailers will help. Students who are interested in movies may already have some basic knowledge of the vocabulary on the site and most of the movie sites. However, for those who do not have this pre-existing knowledge, an outline of the following terms may be useful.

### Vocabulary on Apple Quicktime Trailer Site

- Trailer
- Exclusive
- Plot/Story
- Genre (Drama, Suspense, Thriller, Comedy, Horror, Love story)
- Cast
- Director
- Rating (R, PG, PG-13)

## The Lesson

Students are given a handout with the following instructions:

Choose one movie trailer from the website <http://www.apple.com/trailers/>, and watch it. (There is a clickable link at [the end of this article](#).) After you watch it, answer the following questions:

- What movie did you choose?
- Why did you choose this trailer?
- Who are the actors and actresses in this movie? Who is the director?
- What (if anything) was attractive about the trailer to you? In other words, what did you like or dislike about the trailer?
- After watching the trailer again, outline the story or plot of the movie. This can be done by watching the trailer to gain an understanding of what the movie is about. If the trailer does not give enough information about the plot of the movie, then describe what the trailer did show.
- Would you recommend this movie to your friends? Why or why not? Give reasons for your answers.

## Post-viewing Activity

Naturally, students may tend to view more than one trailer, and then choose the one they want to work on. Therefore, after they have chosen their one trailer, they should start working on the six questions above. There are two ways of doing this: one is to simply have

students write their responses to the questions and hand them in for a class assignment or homework; another is to employ a more interactive type of activity. For teachers looking to keep the interactive aspect of the lesson intact, set up a class message board where students can post messages to each other. (For those institutions without a class message board, students can do the following part of the activity in pairs, or groups). Students then find another person in the class who has chosen the same trailer as them by posting a message on the board. Once the students find another person (or more than one person) who has chosen the same trailer as them, they can work on the answers to the six questions together. This is done on the message board by conversing about the answers to the questions. If some students cannot find a partner who has chosen the same trailer as them, the teacher should encourage them to find other students who have viewed that trailer, or at least have an interest in it. The whole point of this message board conversation is to encourage a conversation in English about the trailers viewed on the site. By discussing their answers to the questions, students are applying their English abilities to complete a focused task on what they have watched on the *Apple Quicktime* website.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The use of the Internet is undoubtedly a useful tool for our students. However, because of the sheer volume of information available, the Internet can be an overwhelming experience for teachers and students alike. Thus, it is vitally important for teachers to be well prepared with specific sites for use going into class. By doing this, teachers can harness the power of the Internet and create meaningful lessons for their students. The activity described here attempts to give students an interesting lesson that they will hopefully gain something from. It is much easier for students to enjoy a lesson they are actually interested in, than having material forced upon them.

The activity outlined here is an extremely useful one, with students regularly reporting their enjoyment of it. Because of considerable student interest in movies, learners always seem to benefit from watching the trailers that appeal to them and discussing their thoughts of them afterward. This activity will be of benefit to any ESL/EFL program that has the required equipment. Further, because of the large amount of movies on the site, there are trailers to suit all levels of students. Indeed, some trailers have limited dialogue to them (as the actual movie is not near completion yet), and would be easy for most, if not all, students to understand. Higher-level students can also gain from this activity, as there are plenty of longer, more in-depth trailers (with a lot of dialogue) on the site.

## A Link to the Site

- <http://www.apple.com/trailers/>

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