

USING TECHNOLOGY WITH COURSEBOOKS

1. What is it?

Learning technology refers to all of the communication, information, and related technologies that are used to support and enhance learning. These technologies may be used by teachers, for example, in the form of interactive whiteboards and projectors, or by learners, for example, in the form of smartphones or tablets. With a Wi-Fi connection, they can provide access to apps and websites with content to support English language learning. This paper will outline some of the many benefits of learning technology and how it can be used alongside coursebooks to enrich the learning process.

2. Why use digital tools with the coursebook?

Motivation and engagement

Pegrum (2014)¹ notes that technology-based activities can enhance learner engagement so that activities become more memorable and the learners are able to remember language and grammar more easily. For example, digital materials used with a coursebook can motivate learners by building persistence with learning new material, giving individual feedback on a task, and providing stickers or badges. However, it is important to keep in mind that learning technology in itself does not automatically motivate or engage learners, and both teachers and learners need training to use technology effectively for learning. For example, teachers should plan digital activities that connect with learners' interests, and that take into account the technological tools they have access to and use beyond the classroom. This can help learners to find personal meaning in what they are learning; as a result, they will be more likely to continue that learning beyond their time in class.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Supporting learners

One great advantage of learning technology is that it can help learners with additional learning needs. Often, content tools such as classroom presentation tools and e-books have accessibility settings which allow the font size to be increased, or the background to be changed for readability. Interactive whiteboards provide the possibility for text from coursebook activities to be manipulated and annotated, for example, to show how words and sentences are constructed. These features are especially helpful for students with additional learning needs, but they are, in fact, useful for making coursebook content clearer and more engaging for all learners.

Digital literacy

By incorporating learning technology into their teaching, teachers are helping to prepare their learners for life beyond the classroom, where they will need to meet digital literacy expectations for their future study or employment. However, the simple act of using digital tools does not automatically result in the development of digital literacy, so teachers should always plan for the possibility that their students will struggle with using certain digital tools, or that they will have difficulty discerning whether information they encounter online is reliable.

Remote learning

The COVID-19 pandemic had a huge impact on the world of learning technology, with digital communications and tools becoming increasingly a part of our daily activities. Once lockdowns lifted, remote learning became more of a choice than a necessity. This can be either fully online or part of a blended approach which combines physical and virtual spaces. Remote learning is particularly attractive to learners who appreciate not having to travel to attend class, or who specifically want to study with an institution that is located far away from home. Main coursebooks have an accompanying e-book, or contain digital components that can be accessed online, making remote learning a realistic option.

Learner autonomy

As increasing numbers of tools become available, learners have more control over what, when, where, and how to learn from their coursebook. This can give them a sense of autonomy, with all its accompanying advantages: greater self-awareness, discipline, and persistence; improved skills in retrieving and synthesizing information, and in the ability to self-evaluate.



3. What are the challenges?

It is a good idea to integrate technology into your teaching practice gradually. Try out activities with colleagues first to see what they think about them, and to ensure they are appropriate for your context and the coursebook being used. You could also ask colleagues if they have any tips for using learning technology: they may be able to tell you about activities they have used successfully, and that have impacted learning positively and improved students' motivation and engagement. Here are some of the challenges you may face, with some suggested solutions.

- 1 Sometimes, technology-based activities do not go to plan. For example, you may not be able to pair the device you are using with the whiteboard, or you may have sound but no image, or vice versa. Internet connectivity is another common issue: connections are variable and can drop with no warning. The number-one rule is to stay calm, and always have a non-digital version of your activity available as a Plan B. Often, learners themselves are good at troubleshooting technology issues, so you could ask them if they are able to help before abandoning Plan A.
- 2 It is important to remain focused on the learning goal and not to get side-tracked by the technology itself. Give yourself ample time to set up activities: trialling them first will give you an idea of how much time you need so you can plan your lesson accordingly. Be careful not to overrun, as this might lead to your being unable to meet learning objectives. Finally, try to avoid having learners staring at their screens or the whiteboard without interacting or engaging in an activity.
- 3 If you are using an interactive whiteboard, think about where students are sitting in relation to it, and make necessary adaptations so that the screen is visible to all. Make sure to have tablets and headphones – or printed versions of the materials – available in case students with visual impairments have difficulty reading an interactive whiteboard.
- 4 Make sure you plan your lesson around the resources available at your school, and ensure the technology is used to support you while meeting learning goals, rather than limiting them. For example, if you decide to make audio recordings of learners in a speaking task for assessment, or for the purpose of error analysis, you could use a phone to record them. However, if a phone is not available, your school may be able to lend you a voice recorder. As such, the activity remains the same, but the technology changes depending on the school's resources.
- 5 Distraction is a potential problem when allowing learners to use their own devices. Learners may be tempted to use their device for personal communications or games, for example. To avoid this issue, it is better to keep tasks short when using student devices. Be specific about when technology is not allowed, and consider drawing up a class contract. This might involve all students agreeing to use their devices solely for learning purposes, and only when the teacher instructs them to do so. Before planning your lesson, make sure your school supports your choice to allow learners to bring and share their own devices, and be mindful of the age of your learners.



4. How can this be implemented?

It is a good idea to check what is already available before you start creating your own activities. You may find that the coursebook comes with suitable digital components. If not, you can add to what the coursebook has to offer, or create your own activities that work alongside the coursebook. Here are some ideas for simple ways to do this.

- 1 An effective way to reinforce vocabulary alongside the coursebook is to use flashcard apps that display digital images and words. You can use them in a game, where learners shout out the item, or in a test format, where they write their answers in their notebooks or on tablets.
- 2 To help reinforce grammar points presented in the coursebook, have learners create a short quiz using a free quiz tool. They then test each other in pairs or groups.
- 3 To stimulate student interest in a new coursebook topic, use an online survey to find out what they already know about the topic, or what their opinion is about certain aspects of the topic in question.
- 4 Pictures are a great way to activate interest in a new coursebook topic and to provide speaking practice. For example, if the topic is sport, tell learners the topic in advance and give them a homework task to find an online picture of a sporting legend who they will talk about in class. Alternatively, students take photos of different items related to a specific sport; then, in class, their classmates try to guess which sport they relate to.
- 5 Coursebooks often come with video content. Show a section of a video and ask learners to transcribe it. They read their scripts aloud to the whole class and compare them with the original video.
- 6 Once you have completed the coursebook practice activities for a new language item, have learners prepare a short conversation to demonstrate the use of the language. They then record themselves using the voice notes app on their device, or make a short video. These can be presented to the class or shared in groups, depending on the class size. They can also be shared with you for individual feedback.
- 7 When you are doing a listening activity with a class, take advantage of the speed control of the audio player in the classroom presentation tool. Try playing short extracts of audio both faster and slower than the default speed to help your learners with audio comprehension at different speeds.
- 8 Take advantage of the speech recognition function of digital devices. With the speech recognition function activated, learners can read aloud a text or a set of new vocabulary items into the notes app on their device. They can then compare the original text with the written version of their text and check for any errors or differences. This helps them to notice any areas of pronunciation they need to work on, and is a great way to encourage students to continue their learning outside the lesson. As a post-listening extension task, give students short sections of the audio script in order, and ask them to read and record themselves using their devices.

- 9 Create a jigsaw reading and listening task as an alternative to having learners read a coursebook text. Give them a section of the text to read aloud and record using the voice notes app on their devices. Play the recordings to the class in the correct order, and then continue with the comprehension questions. This gives students practice with pronunciation, and helps to develop both reading and listening skills.
- 10 E-books allow learners to read and revisit material outside the classroom to develop fluency and build confidence. For young learners, e-books can be easily shared between parent and child. Some digital libraries include stickers and badges for encouragement, which can help to increase motivation.
- 11 Coursebooks give you the option to use both print and digital material versions of their material, so find out which activities work better with printed books and which work better with the digital version. Some will work well if you mix the two; for example, young learners may get stimulus from reading a physical book, but an e-reader can provide extra support through audio, which supports learner independence by enabling them to listen at home.

5. Over to you

Many coursebooks provide digital versions of their print books, the aim of which is to enhance and support the coursebook activities. Think about what works best with your students, and experiment using some of the features offered. Coursebooks offer plenty of guidance on how to use their digital material, so, if this is new to you, they are a great way of familiarizing yourself with learning technology.



Talking points

- 💬 If you have already used technology with your coursebook, what challenges have you encountered? Share your ideas with colleagues, and see what solutions you can come up with together.
- 💬 Select one digital activity and share it with a colleague. Try it out and share your experiences.
- 💬 If your coursebook comes with a digital practice component, select one activity that your students can access on their own devices. Ask them to trial it and to give you their feedback. Did they enjoy using it? Did it help them to remember the vocabulary/grammar, or to improve their pronunciation, for example?
- 💬 Quizzes are a great way of reinforcing language. Which coursebook activities would lend themselves to an engaging quiz using a free quiz app?
- 💬 How could you challenge yourself to learn more about technology-based activities? Does your school offer a course, or is there an online course you can access?
- 💬 What extra skills do you think your learners might need in order to feel comfortable using technology-based activities to enhance their learning?

6. Further reading

10 ways to use technology to build vocabulary

👉 www.readingrockets.org/article/10-ways-use-technology-build-vocabulary

How technology can improve the human element of learning

👉 www.jisc.ac.uk/news/an-education-system-should-have-heart-well-being-and-humanity-at-its-core-07-mar-2022

The use of mobile phones for learning vocabulary

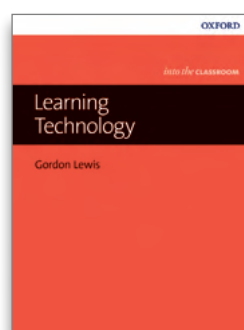
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Teaching digital literacy – whose job is it?

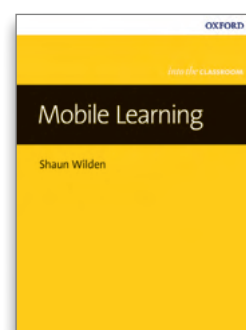
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Endnote

- 1 Pegrum, M. (2014). *Mobile learning: Languages, literacies and cultures*. Palgrave Macmillan.

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