

ONLINE LEARNING: FULLY ONLINE COURSES

Online learning presents unique opportunities for language learners. The creation of the Internet has allowed for students around the world to access authentic language learning materials regardless of physical location. More recently the move toward Internet 2.0, or social sharing over the Internet, has made it possible for English learners to engage with native speakers across a wide array of tools and websites. In this world of effectively limitless authentic English language material, the role of the teacher may seem diminished.

Yet, the sheer amount of content now available online makes the role of the teacher more necessary. While students can access a wide array of language materials on their own, they still need guidance and support as to which materials can best assist them in their learning goals. In this new era of always available English language content, the teacher can serve as guide and facilitator to direct students toward content that can best serve their learning needs.

This week's Teacher's Corner highlights a few options we can use to work with students in the online learning space. First, we'll explore options for pre-existing online learning material. The websites featured offer Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) on a wide array of topics which provide students opportunities to learn new content and subject matter in English.

Next, we investigate options for building your own online courses. Building an online course takes time but can be beneficial by providing students a single website where they can access English language learning material relevant to their level, needs, and abilities.

MASSIVE OPEN ONLINE COURSES

Massive Open Online Courses can be a great option for highly motivated, self-directed learners in your class. These students can benefit from the MOOC philosophy of discovering courses and dedicating the time required to seeing them through to completion. MOOCs cover a diverse array of subjects so students are sure to find a topic interesting to them. However, these MOOCs are often designed for native speakers of English, so the language can be advanced.

There are a variety of ways to incorporate MOOCs into your classroom practice. A great place to start is by searching for MOOCs that are similar in content and objectives to your class. The MOOC material can then be used to supplement the material in your own teaching practice. The videos found in MOOCs are usually of high quality, featuring graphics, diagrams, or subtitles to help learners better understand the content of the MOOC. These videos can be a great supplement to the textbook readings in your own class.

Another option is to have students join a MOOC and take it together. Having this face-to-face community can help students succeed in the MOOC by giving them opportunities to discuss MOOC content with their peers. This could be done in a flipped classroom approach where students interact with the MOOC videos and readings at home and do the MOOC's required homework in the classroom. For more on the flipped classroom model, see Week 4 of this month's Teacher's Corner.

Finding the right MOOC for your students can be a challenge, but the four websites below are a great place to start your search. Each offers a large selection of MOOCs on a variety of topics. Be sure to explore each and take try a few MOOC courses yourself before introducing them in your classroom.

[Khan Academy](#) – Khan Academy has perhaps the least number of courses available, but the site is often noted for the depth of learning in its courses. Khan Academy has no specific language learning classes, but it does offer test prep courses for students who may be interested in applying to university in the U.S.

[Future Learn](#) – Future Learn hosts a wide assortment of English classes that range from specific skills, such as university-level academic writing, to cultural classes that focus on specific material, such as Shakespearean plays. Future Learn’s courses usually have a specific start and end date but also list the expected hours per week that the class requires which can help students plan their course choices.

[Coursera](#) – Coursera has begun specializing in content made for specific universities, but you can still find general education courses on this website. The site does feature English language courses ranging from general skills, such as grammar and pronunciation, to specific skills, such as academic writing.

[EdX](#) – EdX features a selection of English language courses that are accessible to intermediate or higher language learners. These courses are often self-paced, meaning they have no official start or end date, so students can learn at their own pace.

LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

Unlike MOOCs, which are open to everyone, Learning Management Systems (LMS) are online courses built and run by individual teachers or schools. One way to think about the two is that MOOCs are something we learn *from* and LMS are something we learn *with*. MOOCs provide content for learning while an LMS is a place for teachers to host their own content.

LMS allow teachers to host online content for specific classes or student populations. These systems provide teachers an online space where they can collect and store content for students. This can give the class a more organized structure as students can have content delivered to them as opposed to students needing to search the Internet for materials. LMS also have the added benefit of providing the class with discussion boards, wikis (collaboratively-built websites), and glossaries where students can further develop their language skills through targeted language practice.

When using an LMS in your classroom, it is best to consider it the structural support for your class. It provides you and the students a central meeting place to read materials, check homework assignments, and organize the course. Most LMS are organized by weeks with each week hosting the material that will be covered in class. This reduces the need for paper handouts that students may lose and can help them keep track of when assignments are due.

The following LMS suggestions are free-to-use for students and teachers. The first two options are server-based and require more set-up and maintenance time. Each, however, has an active community of users who are able and eager to help in the set-up process. The last two options are web-based and can be used immediately after a sign-up process. However, each has a more standardized appearance

and fewer options for customization. Explore each to discover what each can do and which provides the best fit for your classroom.

[Moodle](#) - Moodle is one of the largest, most established LMS platforms. It is open source, and a community of teachers and learners actively supports its development. As a result, it features the largest selection of tools for an LMS program. By using plug-ins (small bits of software that change larger software) that can be added to the basic site, Moodle can be customized to any learning context.

[Sakai](#) – The Sakai platform is another open source LMS. It features a wide assortment of tools for the online learning classroom including: chat functionality, a gradebook, test creation capabilities, and wikis.

[Schoolology](#) – Schoolology is different than Moodle or Sakai in that individuals can have free accounts, but schools or institutions must pay for the service. At the individual account level, Schoolology provides the basic services of an LMS, such as the ability to post documents, share audio or video, and create discussion boards for students.

[Canvas](#) – Canvas is a web-based LMS similar to Schoolology that contains many of the same features as the other leading LMS. Canvas provides online platforms for classes through its website, so there is no need to set up and install the LMS on your own server as is the case with Moodle and Sakai.