

ELT RESOURCES REVIEW

Classtools as an engaging website for online and in-class learning

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Summary: This article summarizes what Classtools.com can offer in language instruction, how we have used it, and why we believe this resource can help in student engagement and interaction in online teaching.

Keywords: classtools, engagement, online teaching

There is no doubt that teaching in the new norm presented us with the daunting task of engaging our students during the expected and forced digital environment brought upon by COVID. Such challenges are also an incentive for us to look for interactive online educational tools. In this article, we will present an interactive tools-embedded website, [Classtools](#), that makes course lessons and materials more engaging and accessible. We will highlight how this website could be used in an English language teaching context and explain the different options the website provides, which make students' experiences more enjoyable and authentic.

What is Classtools?

Classtools is an online platform that offers a varied selection of interactive tools (see Image 1). These tools allow teachers to create free games, activities, and quizzes in seconds. In addition, they provide a wide variety of engaging options for teachers to enrich their instruction techniques, ranging from writing short sentences or long texts to uploading pictures and videos that can cater to the students' language levels.



Image 1: [Classtools](#) homepage

The majority of these tools are free of charge and no sign-up is required. Teachers can edit and save their work using a four-digit password. When assigning work, the teacher can adjust the security settings with a password or make the content available using just the link. Similarly, students can edit their responses and save their work using secure passwords, which gives them the opportunity to complete their assignments at their own pace (see Image 2). Moreover, all of the tools are easy to use. Each one comes with clear instructions on how to proceed as well as samples of what the outcome might look like. Teachers can even share their finished activities as embedded content, making it easy to share resources through social media. The following sections offer some examples of the tools, summarizing them and their uses, and aims to highlight what makes Classtools unique.

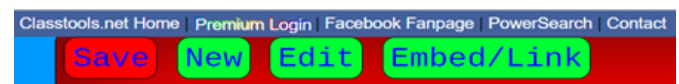


Image 2: Classtools—ways for students to work at their own pace

Image Annotator

Visual imagery offers significant advantages for students when inquiring, elaborating, and explaining a concept; this tool can be of great value in this regard. The Image Annotator allows teachers to add an annotation to an image with a simple click and then ask students to insert phrases, sentences, or longer texts describing the picture (see Image 3). This tool can also be useful in different language learning approaches. For instance, in a reading lesson about inequality, we found this tool helpful in activating students' prior background about the topic. We asked students what they already knew about the injustices portrayed in the picture and then had the students share their predictions based on what they were seeing using the KWL (what I know, what I want to know, and what I learned) strategy. The click and create annotations were, "What I think about the picture," "What I know," and "What I want to know." After finishing the lesson, we asked the class students to return to the "What I want to

know” annotation and add any information they had learned from the reading. In another lesson on grammar about the present continuous tense, we modeled the use of tense for the class by presenting a picture and then describing the actions in the picture’s annotation. We then asked the class to upload the pictures they had chosen and perform a similar activity. We also used this tool in a writing lesson when teaching descriptive writing; as a class, we all described the people, the place, or the thing in the picture.



Image 3: An example of an image annotated by students

Wikipedia

With this tool, students can easily create their own unpublished, imitation Wikipedia-like entries that look just like real online Wikipedia pages. Teachers can demonstrate how to use it by listing dates in a timeline format, writing sentences, and then transforming these into online pages with accompanying pictures. We used this tool for grammar practice to discuss different tenses as well as for writing practice. For example, we first modeled a well-known event or biography of a famous person known to the students in which the verb tenses (past, present, and present perfect) were highlighted. We asked questions emphasizing the usage of verb tenses such as, “Who is he?”, “What did he do?”, “What were his important achievements five years ago?”, and “What has he done lately?” Students took turns writing the dates and sentences about the person and finding pictures to accompany the events. This was highly engaging, as we saw students choosing to write about people they knew and gather information from their first-language online resources and put it in the timeline. We also used this tool for a writing lesson by having the students revise, proofread and then, in seconds,



Image 4: An example of a Wikipedia-like entry

click to publish the piece as a “Wikipedia” page, making it look authentic for the students (see Image 4).

Breaking News Generator

The Headline Generator tool allows students to create news headlines with images in the same format as in real TV news. This was motivating for us as we could use it in various ways to bring authenticity into the class. As a warmup activity, for example, we asked students to write headlines describing how their day went or to report on an incident they had heard about. Students were engaged as they searched for background pictures, presenters and TV channel icons, and then wrote their own headlines. Also, when teaching the skill of summarizing, we first had the class listen to a news story and highlight the key points, which they then summarized as headlines. This same lesson covered the grammar focus of the present perfect tense as an example of describing an action that started in the past and continues in the present (see Image 5).



Image 5: An example of a Breaking News headline generated by students

Image Reveal

Another interesting visual tool is Image Reveal, which allows students to guess what picture is being hidden behind blocks. The process of hiding and showing part of the picture piques students’ curiosity. In a speaking lesson, teachers can start the class by uploading a picture and using Classtools to gradually reveal parts of it while eliciting language from the students through playful phrasing such as “Guess who/what is behind the picture?” We did a similar activity, starting the lesson by modeling an example like that in the image below and asking questions as we removed each block, such as “Who is it?”, “What do you think of this place?”, and “Where is it?” (see Image 6). For lower-level students it can be beneficial to incorporate questions and support them with

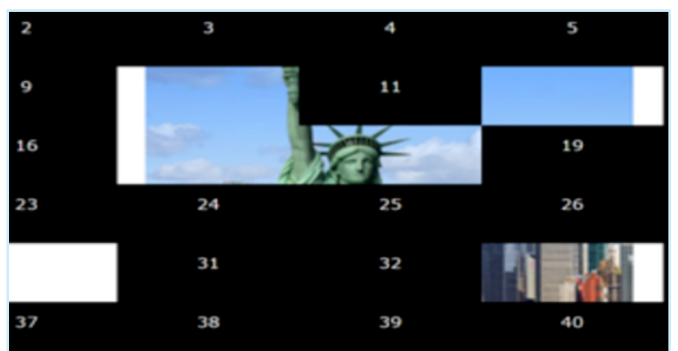


Image 6: An example of an Image Reveal activity

sentence frames to help them answer when needed, such as “I think he is...” and “I wonder if he is...” After this has been modeled a few times, the students can take turns uploading pictures and playing the guessing game.

Badgemaker

Badgemaker allows you to combine a picture and a caption, which students can use to demonstrate their understanding of complex ideas. For instance, when teaching adjectives and figurative language, we first exemplified this objective using ads. Then we had the students create a brand for a product they liked (such as an energy drink) and describe it (e.g., affordable, delicious). The students then added a suitable sentence using figurative language, such as *Spicy chocolate gives you wings*. Similarly, while reading, the students demonstrated their understanding of the main idea of a passage called “Save the World” by creating a badge for a campaign against pollution (see Image 7). Teachers may also find this tool effective for practicing academic vocabulary. For example, similar to the Four Corners strategy, we had the class practice new vocabulary by displaying a vocabulary word with a synonym, choosing a picture to represent the



Image 7: An example of a Badgemaker activity

word, and writing a sentence using the given word. All of the above examples gave the students a chance to engage in high-quality writing practice.

EyeSay!

As shown in the image below, EyeSay is a visual aid in which color-coding helps students recognize a range of sentence lengths and other key features such as topic sentence, linking words, and dates (see Image 8). To use it, all we had to do was to copy and paste the intended paragraph or essay, and then EyeSay identifies the main parts of the type of sentences by way of color coding. Benefits to the students included evaluating the length of their sentences, suggesting better sentence structure, and identifying examples of repetition.

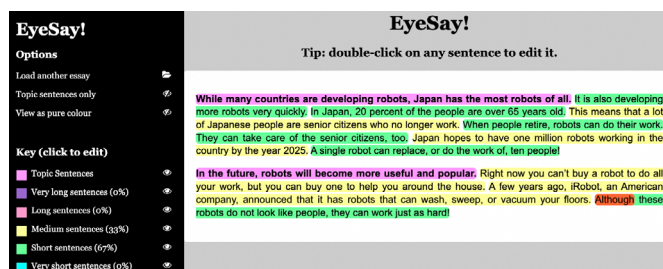


Image 8: An example of an EyeSay activity

Final Thoughts

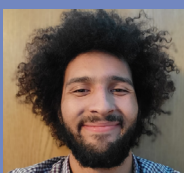
There are many useful ways that Classtools.net can be implemented while meeting language learning objectives of learning, engagement, and interaction. Classtools updates their website often with new tools, so you may expect to find more engaging tools in the future.

CITE THIS ARTICLE

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