

In this article, first published in ENGLISH TEACHING professional, Clarity's Andrew Stokes looks at how what happens before the lesson may hold the key to success.

## Problem free ICT

For any lesson to succeed, preparation is important. Here are five tactics to improve your chances of achieving a successful and trouble-free ICT-based lesson.

### Know the software

The most common cause of failure in a lesson which integrates ICT resources is the teacher not being familiar either with the content of the program they are working with or with the way the software works. You need to be aware of how the language point you are working in is tackled and how it integrates with the coursebook. Similarly, when a student asks you how to move on to the next activity, how to access the glossary or how to get marking, you have to be able to show them immediately.

#### ICT Tip

Before you use a piece of software in an ICT lesson, sit down at the computer, pretend you are a student, and work through everything you want the students to do. This is a great confidence builder!

### Anticipate problems

It is in the nature of a computer that it is more likely to go wrong than a blackboard. Power cuts do happen, so when you're using the computer in class it's a good idea to have a fallback activity up your sleeve. But, with a little forethought, there are other potential problems that can be solved before they happen. The multimedia lab is probably not your usual classroom: if you are planning a groupwork activity, is the lab set out in a way that physically permits this? Have you timed the ICT-based activities you plan to use? Some activities are over in a flash; others last an unexpectedly long time, and it's difficult to predict unless you've tried the activities yourself.

#### ICT Tip

When you are planning to use the multimedia lab for the first time, go in there and make a full lesson plan with an eye on the layout of the room and on the software on the screen in front of you.

### Retain control

Once you are clear on the course the lesson will take you should ensure that your students know exactly what they are going to do. Give your students clear instructions before they go down to the multimedia lab; these can always be run through again before each activity begins. Otherwise you risk losing control of the class and the computers before the lesson even starts. At the end of the lesson, you or your students should note in their student logs what they have achieved in the lesson. This is especially important as there is often no physical record of an ICT-based lesson in the form of written exercises or notes and there is therefore a tendency among students to value these lessons less. A short note can help students' mental integration of ICT lessons into the overall teaching approach.

#### ICT Tip

Keep roaming around the lab. There's bound to be one student who is lost, who is working on the wrong activity or who has found a way of getting into their email account!

### Stay flexible

Some teachers seem to feel that using computers is a separate rather than an integral part of the learning process. In fact, the computer is just another teaching resource, like the whiteboard or the cassette recorder. So being in the multimedia lab does not mean that students have to spend the entire lesson working on the computer: they may, in fact, only use the computer for one or two activities. In a grammar lesson, for example, you might present the simple present on the whiteboard and only at the practice stage use activities from Clarity's grammar program, *Tense Buster*. If you decide to use the *Tense Buster* activity in the presentation stage, you can design worksheets around it. (You can find an example of how to integrate pairwork, groupwork and information gap activities with a grammar presentation at [www.ClaritySupport.com](http://www.ClaritySupport.com))

#### ICT Tip

Don't use the computer just for the sake of it. Decide when an ICT activity is really useful.

### Technology changes

As computers and operating systems are upgraded you need to ensure that your software keeps abreast of the changes. Most publishers bring out periodic upgrades to ensure their software continues to run smoothly and these are often available to be downloaded free of charge from their websites. Note that the smaller independent publishers tend to be much better at this; the big traditional book publishers still think in terms of editions and generally do not provide such good support. It's useful to register yourself with the publisher; that way you will be automatically informed of upgrades and other developments.

### Share problems - and solutions

It's a shame to sacrifice the benefits of ICT because things might go wrong. So it's important to take steps to mitigate this fear among teachers in your department. One effective method of doing this is to keep a logbook of known problems, how they can be solved and who to contact when something breaks down in the computer lab. Ensure that everyone knows where this logbook is, what its purpose is, and how to use it. There's no need to restrict this to problems: it's great when people write encouraging notes about activities that have gone well.

There is no guarantee that ICT-based lessons will always run smoothly, but with a little advanced preparation, you can greatly increase the chances of a trouble-free time in the multimedia lab.

Clarity has a mission to help teachers integrate ICT successfully into their teaching. Please contact us at any time for advice on which programs to use and how to use them effectively with your students.

