




Features and Potentials for Classroom Language Learning

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Google is probably one of the most ubiquitous and well-rounded website that offers various services in many forms. Most Internet users are of course familiar with the basic feature of Google as a powerful search engine and Gmail as a reliable email provider, but not many users are familiar with other services.

In this handout, we are going to discuss some of its features, both the famous and lesser known ones, and see the potentials of those features for teaching and learning languages. Ideas how to use them in your class is the ones with light bulb  symbol.

How to Use the Features

You will need to have an account with Google to use the features. The easiest to do this is to create an email account in  Gmail (<http://gmail.google.com>).

The following are the features of Google and some ideas of how to use them in your teaching

Search



The basic use and probably the most common one is using Google for searching information, but do you know that you can search not just websites but also many different things to?

When you are not sure about grammatical rules of certain words/phrases, you can do a corpus search. Type the word/phrase in question, and see how many occurrences of that in Google results, e.g. “different from” or “different with”?



There are so many things that you can search in Google. Here is the list of search features that Google offers:



Directory

Search the web, organized by topic or category

Assign a topic for your students and ask them to google them in the directory. Students then present their findings of what is the top finding in that topic. Or ask them to write a biography of the celebrity that they like.



News

Search thousands of news stories

Out of reading texts? Use this feature to find news online and ask students to compare and contrast the articles. Or you can explain the many different genres of a text using authentic news articles. Ask the students to pick a newspaper article and explain the genre of the news.



Images

Search for images on the web

In addition to providing images for your materials, this can be used for students to illustrate their presentation. Or have a fun gesture guessing/drawing game. Google a word and when you get the results, show the results to one student. That student is supposed to gesture or



draw the image for other students to guess.



Books

Search books either in full- or limited-preview

Do you want your students to read books but the school library is not updated or complete? Use this feature to find the book and read it online. If you are lucky, you can even get a full-preview of the book.



Videos

Search for videos

In addition to providing videos for your materials, this can be used for students to illustrate their presentation. Or do a dictation practice using the video.



Locations

Search for any locations in the world, presented in map, satellite, or hybrid view. Create a

customized map.

If your students are very keen on reading literary works, why don't you ask them to create a map of the story and share it with their classmates? Around the World in 80 Days by Jules Verne is a good book to start. You can download the book (free!) in Project Gutenberg (<http://www.gutenberg.net>).



Scholar
Search scholarly papers

As a teacher, once in awhile you will be asked to write an action research paper. When the school or campus library does not carry the papers that you need for your paper resources, try finding it using this feature.



Blog Search
Find blogs on your favorite topics

Assign your students with a topic, ask your students to do a simple polling on what other people think of it, then present it in front of the class with quotes from the blog.



Products
Search for products to purchase

Do a fun web quest with this feature. Divide your class into groups of 3 or 4 students. Give a shopping list to each of the group and ask them to find the cheapest product in the list. Any group who spends the least amount of money wins!



Alerts
Get email updates on the topics of your choice

Assign students to different topics and ask them to compile alerts on the topic for certain period of time. After that, ask them to present their findings of the topic especially the trend in that topic. This can be good for something that fluctuates, such as exchange rate, temperature, rainfall, to teach them how do chronological narration or comparative and superlative structure.



Communicate, show & share**Docs**

Create and share your online documents, presentations, and spreadsheets. You can even work together with your partners to edit the documents.

This will be a good tool to work together on projects. Students can learn to edit grammatical mistakes and content. Have you tried telecollaboration with other classes around the globe?

Check <http://www.epals.com> for list of schools that you can work with.

**Groups**

Create mailing lists and discussion groups. There are all kinds of groups for any interests with useful information.

Ask the students to join and 'lurk' in a mailing list of their interest and write a report on what is the 'hot' issue that is being discussed in that mailing list.

**Translate**

Translate words/websites into another language.

This is a good site to give your students practice in noticing errors. Copy or paste a newspaper article or a reading text in your native language into this feature. When the result is out, copy and paste it to Microsoft Word and ask the students to highlight any grammatical or meaning problems.

**Calendar**

Create and share your events and happenings

Ask each student to create their schedule for a week. Then, pair them up and ask them to find a specific time to have a meeting or party. They have to negotiate verbally on the time. This is a good speaking practice for names of days, times, and expressing agreement/disagreement.

**Blogger**

Write down your thoughts and share (blog) them to the world

For any projects that the students do, ask them to blog their projects and their reflection the projects, so that they can reflect on their progress and difficulties.

**Bookmarks**

Share your favorite websites

This is a good tool to share interesting websites among classmates. You can even find out what your students like and dislike and adjust your materials accordingly.



Notebook

Browse, clip, and organize information from across the web; store them in one online location and share it.

This can be a companion tool for doing webquest. Ask the students to form a group and work on a webquest project and save the results using this tool.



Picasa Web Albums

Save your pictures online and share them with your family and friends

Create a photo story on a certain topic. Ask students to take pictures and store them in Picasa. They will need to write a sentence in the picture description so that the pictures, when viewed in sequence, can tell a story.



YouTube

Save your videos online and share them with your family and friends

Ask students to create a video story. Create a playlist of videos that they found in YouTube and present it as a story in class.



Reader

Subscribe to your favorite websites and read their articles/posts daily in one location. You can share your favorite subscriptions.

Assign students to different topics and ask them to compile articles on the topic for certain period of time using this feature. After that, ask them to present their findings of the topic especially the trend in that topic. This can be good for practicing comparative and superlative structure or narrative structure.



Sites

Create a personal website (not a blog).

Ask students to showcase their projects as an online portfolio using this feature.



Talk

Chat with your friends and family through this chatting feature. You can do a text, audio, and video chat with them.



Voice

Call to any land phone numbers in the world for very low cost and even free (calls to U.S.A number, as per April 2011).

Ask students to chat using text, audio, and video with students from other schools around the globe. This can be combined with Google Docs in a telecollaboration project. If you're looking for other schools to work with, you can check <http://www.epals.com>.



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