

THE WORD PROCESSOR IN THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM (Part 1). A Visual and Colourful Way of Working with Vocabulary

M^a Isabel Pérez Torres

This paper is intended as an introduction to a series of articles relating to the use of word processing programmes as a resource for teaching English. Nowadays, the use of these programmes is quite widely spread, which offers a good opportunity to integrate them in the language classroom. As you will see, there are a great many activities that can be carried out in a computer language-assisted environment by simply using a word processor. I especially like working with word processing programmes for two main reasons: first, it implies some sort of fun and creativity display, and secondly, it is easy to plan suitable activities as you go through your daily classroom routine. This first paper will deal with the general characteristics and facilities of a word processor and the reasons that recommend its use. I will also exemplify various practical sessions focus on how to revise and learn new vocabulary with the assistance of a word processor.

Let me explain why I think that the use of the word processor in the classroom is highly recommended for language teaching:

- If there is a kind of software which teachers are used to working with, that is word processing programmes. Most teachers can work with a word processor, though sometimes they cannot use any other software. This is a good chance to do something with our computer apart from writing tests or exercises.
- As well as teachers, students are getting used to writing papers and documents with the word processor. So, they feel confident and proud of being able to show their abilities in the classroom.
- A word processing programme does not require highly advanced hardware. This means that even if the computers available are not very powerful we can install the programme¹. In many schools the computer room is not the ideal one, sometimes we have very new computers together with older ones, but if we use a word processor, we can take advantage of all of them.

In short, word processing programmes are popular, easy to use and do not require sophisticated hardware.

As to more specific and educational reasons and aspects, I will point out the following:

- The activities that can be carried out will be based on the edition of words, sentences and texts. So, students will have to manipulate the language and use it in an accurate way, putting into practice mainly their reading and writing skills, but the variety and range of the activities and skills that can be prepared will depend on the teacher's creativity. In fact, word processing programmes offer a wider set of tasks than those programmes that perform specific language exercises.
- The facilities of rewriting, inserting and deleting text offered by a word processor give the students more freedom and lack of pressure. They are not afraid to write fluently because they know it is not permanent and therefore, it helps the learning process, especially of those students who lack of confidence.

- As to the level and complexity of the activities, we can ask the students to perform from simple to fairly complex exercises. This allows us to deal with *mixed ability* in the classroom.
- Besides, some activities or sections of them can be postponed or taken up again from a different approach, as well as redone after a time or as a kind of revision. I have never seen students happy about redoing an exercise except when they are using computers, because it seems to be a challenge.

Next, I am going to explain a set of activities whose main objective is to learn, improve and revise vocabulary. The activities could be adapted to different levels and groups and, of course, should be considered in the context of the curriculum. With these examples I intend to suggest to you some of the possibilities that this software offers. From my point of view, they are simple tasks that require straightforward actions, but they are more motivating and useful than working with the textbook.

Firstly, the teacher and the students must be familiar with basic **functions** like: inserting, deleting, highlighting, copying, pasting, moving and modifying the text in many ways. All these facilities along with the use of different font size and types, and the possibility of underlying, writing in bold or cursive, using colours or animations give the activities a touch of fun and game that allow the students to forget that they are learning English. But at the end of the activity they practise as much as they do in a more traditional manner and, of course, enjoy it more. Especially those students who are hyperactive and cannot normally concentrate on an activity for any length of time.

The texts that we can use to perform the activities may come from different sources; in some cases there will be no previous text, as the students will have to complete a table or write the document partially or completely. If the activity requires a text it may be obtained from a web page or an encyclopædia (highlight, copy and paste it), a scanned document (from the textbook, a magazine, etc.) or you can even tell the students to copy the text for you. Of course, you can always type it as well.

Taking into account the functions we have mentioned above, we could summarise the actions that the students will be asked to do under three main headings: modifying, producing and understanding. The following activities will be examples of these types of actions and will provide you with other tasks to carry out in your actual and daily experience.

Finally, I usually get my students to **work in pairs** because they prefer it that way and experience tells me that they collaborate with each other and get more involved than when working on their own. Apart from that, I normally have more students in the classroom than the number of computers available.

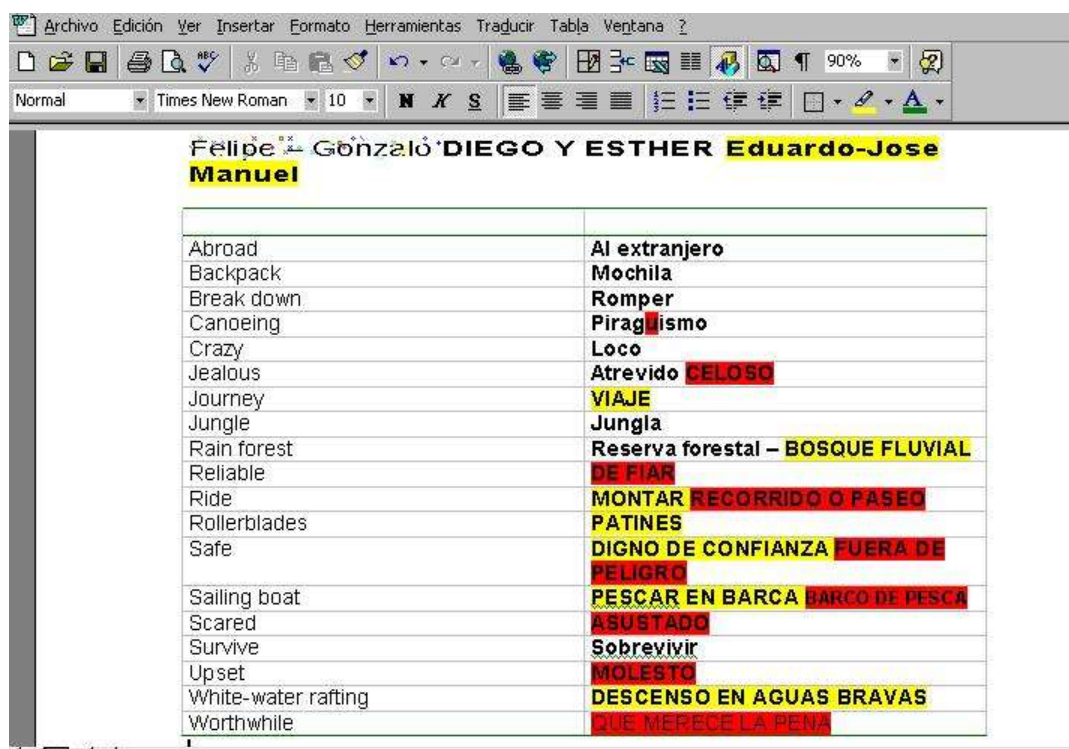
Activity I Vocabulary Revision

Aim. This can be done as a warming up activity to introduce new vocabulary from a new unit or semantic field or to revise vocabulary after having finished a unit or a number of units.

Pre-activities. Tell the students to revise the vocabulary and write down the words you want them to learn or revise in their notebook. That will be done as homework. Then, in the classroom, before running the programme they will have five minutes to go through the vocabulary briefly.

Procedure and Tasks. This activity is simple and easy to carry out. The students need to know how to create a table, how to write in bold and in different colours and how to underline in colours, too.

- Divide the students in pairs. Throughout the activity they are going to move posts. Using the book, each pair of students will fill a column of a table with the words from the vocabulary list that they think are more difficult, in English or in Spanish, as you decide in each case.
- This way they will set a sort of test for a second pair of students who will have to complete the column of meaning.
- A third pair will go through the answers of the second one and will make changes if they do not agree; though they will not delete anything that the others wrote previously.
- Finally, the students who set the test will mark it making corrections. Each pair will write in a different colour and the corrections will be marked in red, they will also write their names at the top, in the same colour that they use to do the exercise, so that everyone will know whose answers they are. (picture 1)



English	Spanish
Abroad	Al extranjero
Backpack	Mochila
Break down	Romper
Canoeing	Piragüismo
Crazy	Loco
Jealous	Atrevido CELOSO
Journey	VIAJE
Jungle	Jungla
Rain forest	Reserva forestal – BOSQUE FLUVIAL
Reliable	DE FIAR
Ride	MONTAR RECORRIDO O PASEO
Rollerblades	PATINES
Safe	DIGNO DE CONFIANZA FUERA DE PELIGRO
Sailing boat	PESCAR EN BARCA BARCO DE PESCA
Scared	ASUSTADO
Survive	Sobrevivir
Upset	MOLESTO
White-water rafting	DESCENSO EN AGUAS BRAVAS
Worthwhile	QUE MERECE LA PENAL

Picture 1

Post-activities Students make a note of the words they didn't know to revise them at home and write some sentences using them. We could do it again after a few days or as a revision after we have finished the unit.

Comments

As you see, this is a different manner of revising vocabulary, in a visual (table, colours) and kinaesthetic (typing, moving around) way. At the end of the activity, the document will be quite colourful and attractive. Students have to use their imagination to decide which font type and colour to use and go through the vocabulary on at least three different computers trying to do their best and correcting other partners' work, something that they really like doing.

Once you have practised for a few sessions it will take less than half an hour and it could be the introduction to another exercise on the computer.

Activity II

Synonyms

Aim To work with synonyms and parts of speech.

Material In this case I am using a text from a Web page in The Internet, the text is about drugs and teenagers and it has usual vocabulary for *Bachillerato*.

It belongs to a series of texts about teenagers, drugs and alcohol that I have prepared to work different grammar and vocabulary aspects as well as the social ones.

Pre-activities. Get the students to write a list of reasons why teenagers take drugs and alcohol. Discuss these reasons and other aspects that you think may be of interest to them.

Procedures and Tasks. The teacher has prepared the text and marked in bold the words he/she wants them to revise and work with. The students need to know how to highlight, copy and paste words and any parts of the text. They also need to know how to use the word processor facility of looking for synonyms and replacing them and finally, how to create and complete a table. They have the following instructions at the beginning of the Word document:

1. Read the text quickly and try to understand the general message.
2. Look at the words in **bold** and guess the meaning from the context if you don't know it.
3. Decide what part of speech the words in bold are and complete the following table with them:

NOUN	VERB	ADJECTIVE

4. Copy and paste the whole text, so that you have it twice. In the second copy, look for synonyms of the words in bold and replace them if you find an appropriate new word. Take into account the part of speech they are.
5. Compare the synonyms you have chosen with the ones your partners have selected. Discuss why you chose them and which one will be more suitable.
6. Finally, complete the table with other words that have the same root (or related words), but are different parts of speech. Use the words in the first text and the one you have chosen to replace them. Use different colours.

NOUN	ADJECTIVE	VERB
Appearance		
		Concern
Truancy		
Mood		
	Abrupt	
	Harmful	
	Available	
	Observant	

Drugs & Teens

Statistics indicate that a growing number of young people today are experimenting with **drugs**. Some teens use drugs to escape their problems. Others do it for acceptance by their **peers**. Teen alcohol and drug prevention is a big **concern** for many adults. Following are some **tips** on prevention and **recognizing** signs of drug use.

Prevention Tips:

- Discuss the **harmful** effects of alcohol
- Be **available** and **supportive**; listen to
- Be **smart** about your own alcohol and drugs, they'll think it's **acceptable**.

Warning Signs of Alcohol or Drug Use:

- Deterioration in personal **appearance**
- Unexplained spending
- **Abrupt** mood swings
- Rapidly declining grades
- Changes in friends
- Changes in eating or sleeping habits
- **Truancy**

Sinónimos: Inglés (Reino Unido)

Sinónimos para: concern

Reemplazar por el sinónimo:

Significados:

affair (sustantivo)
anxiety (sustantivo)
importance (sustantivo)
company (sustantivo)
affect (verb)
be interested in (verb)
worry (verb)

Reemplazar Buscar Anterior Cancelar

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Inicio Drugs & Teens - N... Microsoft Word... Explorando - Mis d... Dibujo - Paint 0:25

Picture 2

Post-activities Give the students a printed copy of the text and ask them to read it again for homework and write a short composition related to the subject. For example:

- a. What would do if your best friend had a problem with drugs?
- b. Give reasons for and against legalising drugs.

Comments

Depending on the level of the students, the activity will take a session of about 50 minutes or more, so we could carry out the activity in one or one and a half sessions. Working with the word processor in this way allows each student to do it at his/her own pace and advanced students could even start the composition on the computer if they finished before the others in the class.

In any case, whether we are going to go again through the activity or not, the final document should be saved for a later revision or any other activity we can think of related to it, or simply for further evaluation by the teacher.

Activity III Vocabulary Building

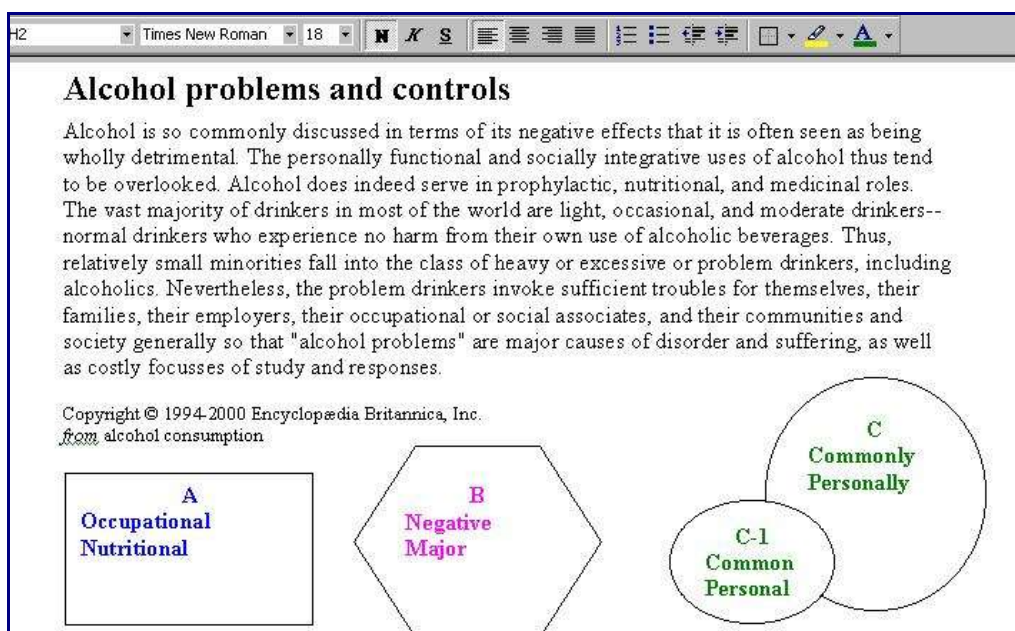
Aim To practise vocabulary building and distinguish different parts of speech and their functions.

Pre-activities The teacher revise word formation patterns in English, parts of speech and the functions they usually perform.

Material The text comes from the Encyclopedia Britannica and it is also related to alcohol problems.

Procedures and Tasks The students need to know how to create geometric forms and add text to them and underline and type in different colours.

They will have the following document and will do the exercises that will be at the bottom.



Picture3

1. Read the text and underline the words that belong to the each group, A; B and C in different colours. Then, add them to the geometric patterns. What part of speech do each group represent?
2. Next to each pattern create another one and complete it with the words that originate the previous ones, as in the example C-1. Say what part of speech they are, too.
3. Can you observe any morphological differences between words in group **B** and words in group **C**?
4. What other groups of words could you generate?

true/raise and/or comprehension questions and ask them to do it for homework.

Comments

Instead of drawing geometric patterns you can create tables, but the use of different patterns suggests different ways of generating words and also adds a visual component to the task.

Activity IV

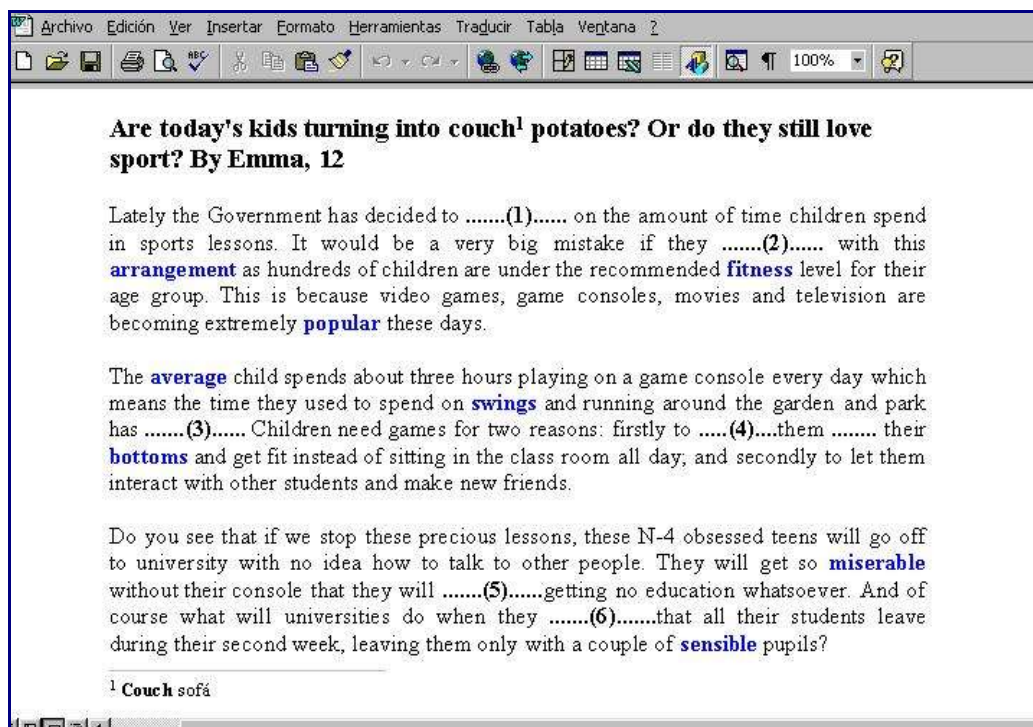
Phrasal Verbs and Definitions

Aim To work with phrasal verbs, meanings, definitions and accuracy in using vocabulary.

Pre-activities Using the dictionary (one installed on the computer if possible) get the students to look for the meaning of some phrasal verbs with different particles, like for example: go, take, cut, work and find, and make a comment about it.

Material The text is a comment by a young girl about a news, published in a Web page.

Procedures and Tasks Ask the students to read the text and do the activities that will be at the bottom of the page.



Picture4

1. Read the text and complete the blanks with the correct form of the suitable phrasal verb:

2. Go down, cut down, put off
3. Carry on, get on, take up
4. Get down, go down, settle down,
5. Take off, get off, go off
6. Get out, work out, drop out
7. Find out, work out, go out

2. Match the words with the definitions by using the same colour like in the example. Then, move the definition in front of the word:

Arrangement	Very unhappy or sad
Average	The condition of being in good physical health
Popular	Something that you have agreed or settled
Fitness	Having or showing good judgement
Bottoms	Normal or typical
Miserable	Enjoyed or liked by a lot of people
Swing	A seat that hangs down
Sensible	The part of your body that you sit on

bout
or if

Comments

This type of exercises are very similar to traditional written ones, but the fact that they can change the answer without letting it show makes the students feel confident and take the risk more easily.

Conclusions

Up to here I have shown some ways of working with vocabulary using a word processor, the key is to use your imagination and take advantage of the students' liking for computers. The use of colour, tables and other facilities, which are offered by a word processing programme, gives the activity a touch of enjoyment and fun. Besides, the possibility of deleting and merging text allows fluency and ease of answering.

Those teachers who have no experience in CALL¹ may find that working with a word processor is a good opportunity to start because it is not difficult to use the programme and on many occasions there will be an active collaboration between the teacher and the students. On the other hand, those who are experienced Call users might not have considered word processing programmes a good alternative, but as far as I have experimented in the classroom, it has turned out to be as useful as any other specific software for teaching languages. Therefore, I highly recommend its use.

¹ The most popular one is “Microsoft Word”, and any version will do for the activities suggested in this paper.

² Computer Assisted Language Learning