

THE WORD PROCESSOR IN THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM (Part 2)

From Simple To More Complex Tasks

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In my experience, using computers in the English classroom - and particularly word processors - motivates students because we apply for their participation and creativity, especially when they have to perform tasks that imply more than one action. Most of them want to show their abilities in using new technology and that extends to the English tasks they have to carry out.

You have probably heard of theories of Multiple Intelligences, as well as Neuro Linguistic Programming related to the learning process. These are established on the basis that we learn better when the process implies the use of multiple senses. Considering these theories, when we ask the students to do exercises by using a word processor we are offering them the opportunity of using more than one sense, and showing their abilities in varied ways. I think bodily and visual learners are the ones that benefit more from using word processors. Let us consider a few reasons to support this: typing makes ¹kinaesthetic learners learn easily as it implies the sense of touch. The use of colours, varied fonts and other facilities of a word processor attracts the attention of visual learners and helps them to fix what they learn better; even the sound of the keys when typing can help those students with well developed auditory skills.

Bearing the use of multiple senses in mind, this paper will deal with the practical possibilities that a word processor offers to carry out activities, from very simple to more complex ones. I will exemplify this with some sessions ordered according to complexity of the functions and tasks that students have to perform. I have planned the activities in the context of a secondary English lesson with students from the first cycle of ESO to higher levels.

I would refer you to the first part of this paper, published in the previous issue, to understand this second part better. There I stated the general implications and facts about the use of a word processor in the English classroom, and gave examples of activities mainly related to learning vocabulary. But, to introduce this second part, I will summarize some basic ideas to keep in mind:

- The main objective is to allow students to put into practice their reading and writing skills; using a word processor implies manipulating the language quite freely. Students become more autonomous and have no fear to fail, as it is easier to correct or change the answers.
- The activities and exercises should be connected to the curriculum; the tasks will mainly involve revising language aspects, introducing new ones and correcting mistakes. It is important that students know how to use the main functions of a word processor.
- Instructions on what students have to do or not to do must be clear. They also must feel confident with the activity they have to carry out, so that they don't feel frustrated, because that would be contrary to our aim. They will usually work in pairs, which will permit collaboration in many senses.

The activities that can be carried out by means of a word processor can be as simple as recognizing morphological terms or as complex as completing or writing texts. I will now suggest some possible tasks in order of complexity and listed below each of the three actions that I consider basic:

- Modifying:
 - Substituting information, grammatical, morphological or lexical elements
 - Correcting mistakes of any matter kind

¹ They learn better by using touch, smell and bodily sensations

- Changing the text with new information or a different point of view
- Comprehending:
 - Choosing the right answer once after reading the text
 - Filling tables with morphological, grammatical or lexical elements
 - Ordering sentences, paragraphs or any other discourse elements
 - Skimming and scanning information for answering questions
- Producing:
 - Filling texts with morphological, grammatical or lexical elements given or not given
 - Completing sentences, dialogues, stories, etc.
 - Summarizing or amplifying a sentence or a text
 - Writing text according to a given model or as an answer to another text

Finally, I will show you some examples of activities with a different grade of complexity from simple to more complicated:

Activity I Tense Revision

Aim To recognize verb forms and revise different verb tenses. To produce sentences according to the models.

Material List of mixed up sentences written by the teacher or a student, copied or not from a text or grammar book. (Picture1)

Procedure and Tasks This activity is simple and short. The students need to know how to draw text from one part to another and how to change font colours. (Picture1b)

- Working in pairs or individually, students will go through a list of sentences with different verb tenses that are mixed up. First, when they recognize the verb tenses, they have to turn them into the colour proposed by the exercise for each verb tense. When they finish colouring the verbs they have to place the sentences under the corresponding verb tense headline.
- The teacher goes around the classroom checking the students' work and helping them in case of any problems or doubts.
- The students have to add two more sentences to each group about themselves.

Bruce went to Gibraltar last Saturday because he wanted to visit his aunt Jillian
It started to rain when we were playing football
Do you study French at school?
He was talking to a tall blond girl
I decided to stop smoking yesterday
He never listens to classical music
We're dancing the new Ricky Martin song
I get up at seven every day
Did she phone you? No, she didn't
Who won the World Football Cup in 1998?
They like dancing "rumbas" and "sevillanas"
We were having dinner when we heard a big explosion
She's always shouting at me
What were you doing when Franco died?

Picture 1

Exercises

1. Read the sentences and colour the verbs according to the following pattern:
Present Simple, **Present Continuous**, **Past simple**, **Past Continuous**
2. Now, put them into the table below according to the tenses.

Present Simple
Present Continuous
Past simple
Past Continuous

Picture 1b

Post-activities Students have to revise the grammar section in the book, particularly if they have had any mistakes. They can write a few more sentences for homework.

Comments This is quite a simple activity that can be done after finishing a set of units where we have been revising various verb tenses. We do this all the time, but this way is more entertaining. The final document will be very colourful. The students can also use different font type for each verb tense or even font animation. Following this exercise pattern, you can carry out simpler activities for example: looking for parts of speech in sentences or in a whole text.

Activity II

Mistake Corrections

Aim To revise sentence structure and other linguistic elements by finding mistakes and substituting them with the right choice.

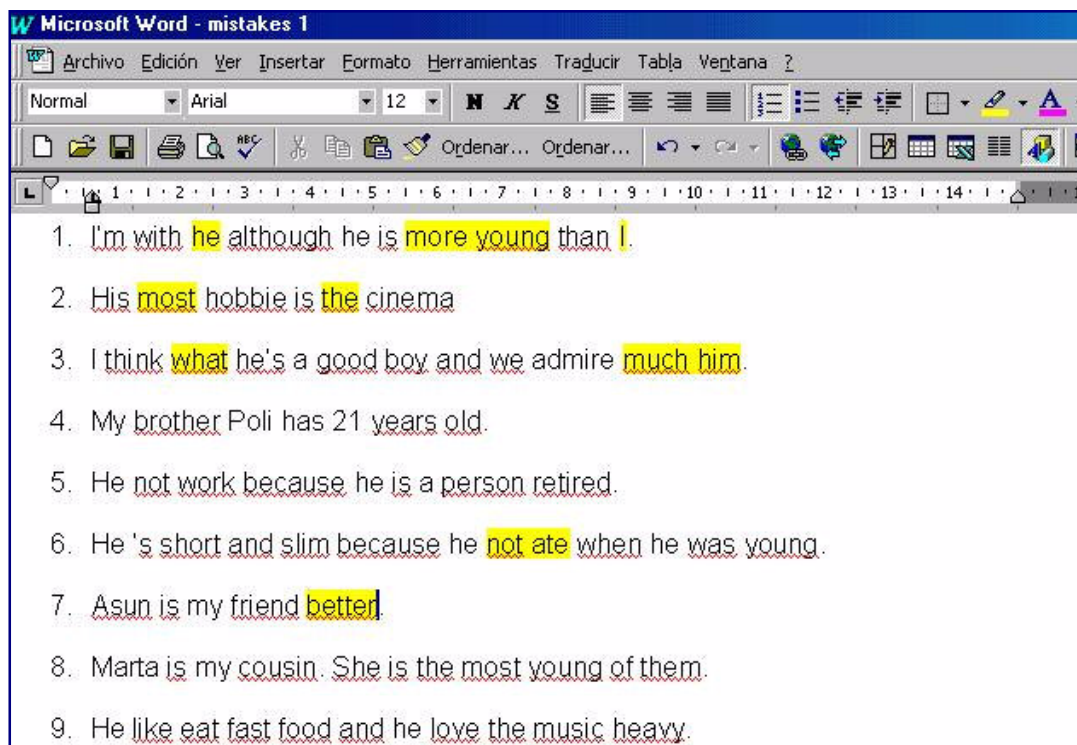
Material List of sentences with all kind of common mistakes. The sentences have been copied from the students' compositions when the teacher corrects them. (Picture 2) (of course, there are more mistakes than the ones highlighted in the picture)

Pre-activities A few days before going to the computer room, give back the corrected compositions. The mistakes will be marked, but not replaced with the correct options. Each student goes throughout his/her composition and try to correct the mistakes.

Procedures and Tasks The students need to know how to highlight, delete and replace parts of the text.

- Firstly, they highlight the words or parts of the sentence that they think are wrong
- Secondly, they copy and paste all the sentences with the mistakes already highlighted at the end of the document.
- In this copy they replace the highlighted parts with the right uses, in bold or using the same font colour for the corrections.
- The teacher goes around checking the students' corrections and offering them help if they are wrong.

Comments This activity is more complicated than activity 1 because it involves more elements: pronouns, verbs, nouns, etc. The mistakes can be of any kind, providing that they are common. The reason for copying and pasting the sentences once the mistakes have been highlighted, but not corrected, is that it is possible that the students are wrong in finding the mistakes and have to go back to the original sentence. Students usually like correcting mistakes this way a lot, in any case, there is a big difference in their attitude towards traditional correction on their notebook and this new way on the word processor. It can be done with any students because the level of the sentences will depend on their own level.



Picture 2

Activity III

Reading Comprehension

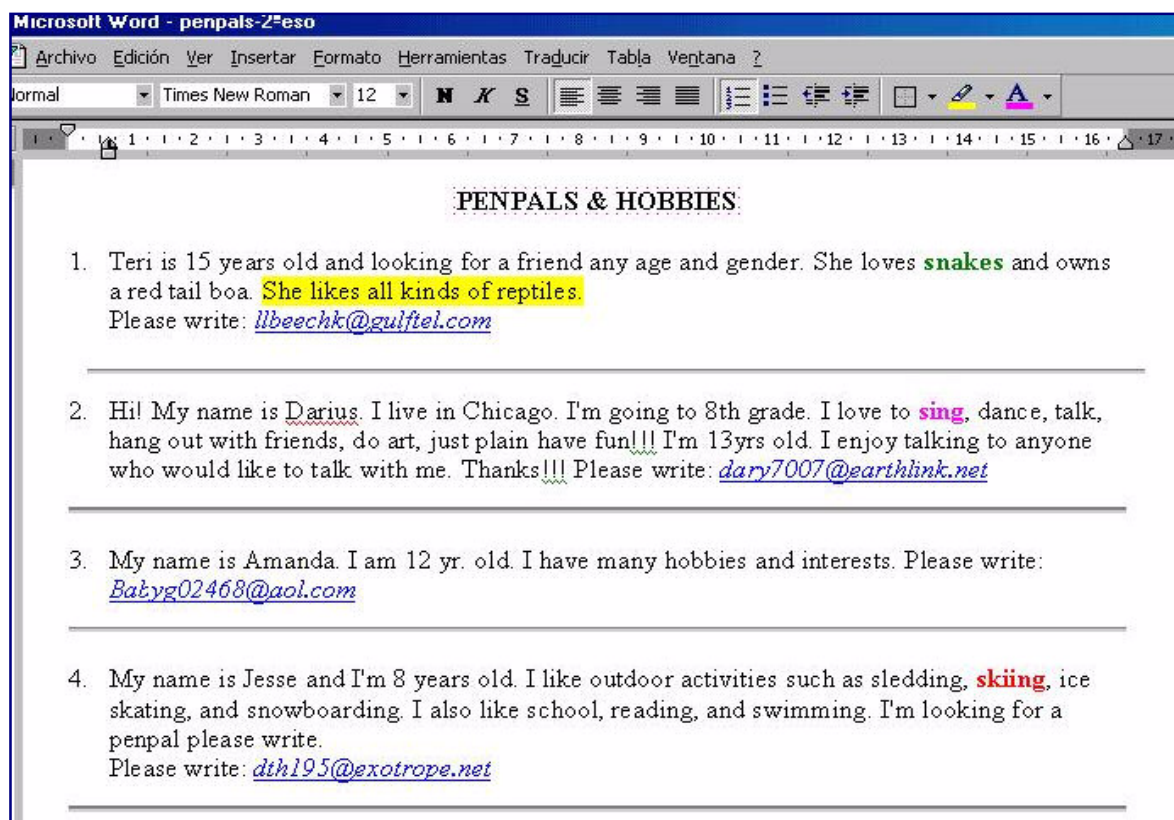
Aim To read and comprehend short texts. To recognize and learn vocabulary. To produce a message according to the models given.

Pre-activities The teacher revises introductions and ways of talking about likes and dislikes.

Material The text comes from a penpal site in the Internet. The teacher has copied and pasted the messages he/she finds appropriate for his/her class.

Procedures and Tasks The students need to know how to highlight text, use bold and colours, copy and paste text from one part of the text to the table. They also need to know how to look words up in the electronic dictionary previously installed in the computer, for them this is easier than using a paper dictionary. They will have a document with around ten messages (Picture 3 shows part of it) and will do the exercises that will be after the messages and you have in picture 3b.

Comments The complexity of the activity falls on the multiple tasks students have to perform and also in the fact that they have to be able to write their own text. Production is always a difficult task for students even if it is guided. Depending on the students' level, this activity can be carried out in one or two sessions. I have to add again that they enjoy using the electronic dictionary more than the paper one.



Picture 3

EXERCISES

1. Find out where these boys and girls are from:

Name	Male or female	Country- Town

2. Read the messages quickly and turn into **green** and **bold** the hobbies related to **animals** like in the example.
3. Read the messages again and turn into **red** and **bold** the hobbies related to **sport**.
4. Now turn into **pink** and **bold** the **rest of hobbies**.
5. Fill the following table with some of the hobbies (at least 5 in each column):

Animals	Sport	Other hobbies

6. What hobbies do these people have in common?
7. What hobbies do you share with them?
8. Translate the sentences underlined in **yellow**
9. Give the meaning of the following words and expressions:

Words	Meaning
Hang out	
Ice-skating	
Corn snakes	
Soccer	
Look forward	
World	
Fifth grade	

10. Write your own message:

Picture 3b

Activity IV

Conjunctions and Sentence Transformation

Aim To revise past simple and present perfect tense. To revise conjunctions as the same time as they comprehend the story. Finally, they will practise passive voice and reported speech.

Pre-activities The teacher can introduce the story by raising a discussion about teachers and students' rights and obligations. A less controversial introduction may be a revision of reported speech.

Material The text is recent news from a Web site called Ananova News. It is the story of a teacher that has been suspended because she made a joke about shooting her students.

Procedures and Tasks Ask the students to read the text and follow the activities that will be at the bottom of the page and you have in picture 4 b.

Teacher's gun joke backfires

An American school teacher joked she would shoot pupils _____ **fail** to learn algebra - _____ her ¹quip ¹ **backfire** and she has been suspended.

The maths teacher at Grafton High School in West Virginia thinks most of the students **understand** it was a joke.

The statement **be** made _____ she **tell** students they better learn their algebra facts. _____ one pupil **ask**: "Or what?", she **say** she'd just shoot them, adding they **be** safe until Christmas _____ her husband **not be** getting a gun until then.

School administrators _____ **fail** to see the funny side of the joke **ban** her temporarily from the classroom _____ will not say what other action they **take**, says [The Daily Press](#).

School spokeswoman Betsy Overkamp-Smith said the action **be** "appropriate given the situation and what our investigation **show**".

She also said that the school "is not in support of anyone _____ makes the kinds of comments alleged".

The teacher said: "I know now it was inappropriate and I wouldn't say it again. This day and time, it's hard to joke with students. You have to be careful what you say."

Picture 4

EXERCISES

1. Go throughout the text and **replace** the verbs **underlined in yellow** with the past tense form, and the ones **underlined in green** with the present perfect tense form.
2. Read the text and fill the gaps with one of the conjunctions given bellow. The number indicates how many times you have to use each of the conjunctions. **Who (3) but (2) when (2) because (1)**. Write them in bold
3. Now, read the text again and decide which **five words** you would like **to look up in the electronic dictionary** to understand the story better. Look them up, paste the words and their meaning down here
4. **Rewrite** the following sentences so that the meaning doesn't change:
 - a) She has been suspended. School administrators.....
 - b) The teacher said: "I know now it was inappropriate and I wouldn't say it again. This day and time, it's hard to joke with students. You have to be careful what you say." The teacher said that.....
 - c) Find some more sentences in direct or indirect speech and transform them, too.
5. **Do you think the teacher was joking or not?** Do you think it was fair to suspend the teacher? Answer the questions and write a few sentences supporting the school administrators or the teacher.

Picture 4b

Post-activities summarise Ask the students to write a short composition telling a story they know that may be similar to this one. They can type it on the word processor if they finish soon with the previous tasks, or on a paper or word document at home.

Comments As you see, this text can arouse discussion in the class. Which opinion would you support? News is good for preparing more complex activities because it is usually written for native speakers and so it uses complex and varied structures and vocabulary. You can do this exercise in a traditional way and not necessarily on a word processor, but I think particularly that more complex exercises are better done on the computer because the answers can be changed easily and students feel more confident.

Conclusions

As I said in Part one, word processor programmes do not require sophisticated computer rooms and the majority of teachers can use them. Besides, the activities do not have to be different from the habitual ones in textbooks; for this reason, I suggest you start using word processor programmes in your language classroom.

But there are some more convincing reasons for carrying out these type of activities, like for example: the time usually passes more quickly and students are more concentrated on the tasks and, surprisingly, they want to finish the tasks before the lesson ends. As you can see, what they do in these sessions is more entertaining, they move, they use colours, they correct themselves, they talk and you don't mind etc. This takes us back to the Multiple Intelligence theory. I think that in a traditional lesson students also use all their senses and imagination, but each sense is paying attention to something different. For example: they may be talking to their classmate about last night, tapping the pen on the table, trying to listen to the teacher, drawing a picture on the book. Whereas, when they are working in a session with computers in general and with a word processor in particular, they tend to concentrate their senses at one time to do the tasks requested and, in my opinion, that means a difference in the learning process.

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