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What are newspapers on CD-ROM?

Most people are familiar with CDs or compact discs as discs on which music is stored. However, it is possible to store any kind of digital information on a CD, and computers can read information from a CD in the same way they read floppy computer discs. Huge amounts of information can be stored on a CD: all the articles published in one newspaper for one whole year can be fitted on a single CD. What is more, the CD-ROM will locate within seconds all the articles on any subject you specify, and then print them out.

Newspapers on CD-ROM as a resource for teaching civilisation/culture and current affairs

A problem which is frequently encountered by language teachers is how to provide learners with up-to-date information on civilisation/cultural topics and current issues for the country which the learners are studying.

Such information can be useful for Culture and Civilisation components in foreign language and EFL courses, for many diverse examinations, for learners who need to access it for project work and as a basis for conversation work and debates.

This problem is familiar to foreign language teachers in the UK, who have problems in locating sufficient data because they are not physically in the foreign country concerned. It is also familiar to the many EFL teachers who work abroad, because they are not physically in the UK, do not have a wealth of materials to hand, and feel out of touch with what is happening in the UK.

Several books are available which provide an outline of civilisation and cultural issues, but they are often too generalised and in insufficient depth for project work and, in a rapidly-changing world, are often out of date in some respects by the time they are published: the British education system, for example, is in a constant state of flux. Newspapers and news magazines are clearly the best way to obtain up-to-date and detailed information on current issues, but there are several problems involved in access. The physical space involved in storing years' collections is considerable, as is the difficulty in keeping them in order. Interesting articles get cut out and disappear. If a particular group expresses a particular interest (for example in euthanasia or Corsican nationalism or football hooliganism) it can take hours of searching through back copies to locate suitable stories. Teachers who live outside the country whose language they are teaching can find it expensive and inconvenient to obtain daily newspapers from the country concerned.

Newspapers on CD-ROM provide an appropriate solution to the above problems at a reasonable cost. If, as in the above example, you want to locate articles about euthanasia, you simply type in 'euthanasia' as your search word, and you will instantly have a list of the headlines of all the articles for the last year in which the word 'euthanasia' occurs. Press another key and you can read the articles to see how relevant they are. Press another key and you can print the relevant articles. It is also possible to do more sophisticated searches in order to widen or narrow the search.

The problem of space is solved in that a CD-ROM drive and software can often be fitted inside your computer, and an external drive is generally the size of A4 paper. The articles do not need to be kept in order: the computer will sort the articles in any order you want. The time spent searching for articles is cut to a few seconds. The cost can be extremely reasonable com-

pared to a newspaper subscription: one year's subscription to 'The Times and Sunday Times on CD-ROM', for example, is only £195 +VAT +postage to any country. One year's subscription to 'Le Monde on CD-ROM' is £245 +VAT +postage to UK educational establishments.

To give some idea of how many articles might be instantly available for a particular civilisation/culture area, I conducted a search. The figures show how many articles were found treating that general area for 'The Independent on CD-ROM' January–October 1993.

Monarchy	199
EEC/EC	1680
Crime	3206
Northern Ireland	872
Class system	30

Using the articles for language learning exercises

Once you have located articles which are of particular interest and relevance to your learners, you can use them as a basis for producing your own materials. You also have the additional opportunity of using the texts as a basis for language learning exercises. This has the advantage of introducing civilisation topics to the students at the same time as they are doing the exercises. Here are some possibilities.

1. *Alter the text.* Once you have the text of the article on-screen, you can easily convert it into a gapped passage by deleting words and typing dots in their place before printing them out. Or you can gap the passage and provide all the missing words jumbled up at the end of the article. Or you can put all verbs into the infinitive, remove all linking words or remove all capitals and punctuation depending on the focus you require. Or you can create a guided writing exercise by making each sentence into a series of prompts.
2. *Vocabulary exercises.* Once you have the text of the article on-screen, you can italicise or underline key or new words and then add an exercise at the end of the article. For example, have the learners infer the meanings of the key words, give definitions to match with the key words. Use the key words as a basis for dictionary work.
3. *Comprehension tests.* These can be in the form of comprehension questions, true/false questions, multiple choice or alternative summaries to choose from.
4. *Scanning for information.* Ask the learners to scan the article to obtain factual information.
5. *Ordering articles.* Cut the article into paragraphs and have the learners reconstruct the article by putting the paragraphs in the correct order. Or you can mix up two separate articles with titles and have the learners separate and reconstruct them both. Or you can mix up a pile of articles and a pile of headlines and have the learners match the headlines and articles together.
6. *Information transfer.* Produce an exercise which involves taking information from the text and transferring it to another format e.g. filling in a flow chart, questionnaire, biography etc.

The advantage of writing the above exercises by means of the CD-ROM is that the exercises can be simply typed onto the end of the article while it is on-screen. When it is printed out therefore, the result will tend to look a lot more professional than photocopied newspaper articles with exercises typed on a separate sheet. The article and exercise can then be saved on computer for future use.

For a wide variety of excellent ideas on how to use newspaper articles in the language classroom, read the resource book *Newspapers* by Peter Grundy (Grundy, 1993)

Using the texts for CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning)

Any of the newspaper texts can be saved as ASCII files: ASCII is a standard format which can be used by almost any word processing software. This means that the newspaper articles can then be imported and used by various computer programs for language learning. Wida Software and Camsoft have CALL programs which can import ASCII files (and which support foreign language characters), including cloze and gapping programs, vocabulary, multiple choice, jumbling and matching exercises. *Storyboard*, for example, is a program very popular with learners, in which they read the text for as long as they want. The computer then completely removes the text, leaving dots on the screen where the words were. The learners then reconstruct the text, asking the computer for help when required.

Alternatively the text can be imported into a concordancer as an ASCII file, and work can be undertaken on the collocations and contexts of particular words. Wordlists and analyses of word frequency can also be created.

Using articles as a basis for conversation classes

In conversation classes it is often useful to have a textual input in order to present basic facts to order a debate and to provide a stimulus. Some possibilities are:

1. *Summarise and report back to the group.* Choose a subject, e.g., abortion. Print out a number of articles so that each learner has an article. The learners read the article and write a brief summary which they read out to the group. Group discussion of the event or opinion expressed in the article.
2. *Role play.* Letters to the editor on a topic are useful here. Choose a controversial topic, e.g., the EU, and give each learner a letter so that a wide range of opinion is represented in the class. The learners invent a personality for themselves to fit the tone of the letter (e.g., Brigadier Fortescue-Smythe of Tunbridge Wells). The teacher opens the debate and each learner contributes in role.

Alternatively, newspaper reports of debates can be very useful. I used the report of *The Times* debate on the monarchy as a role play. Each learner assumed the role of one of the speakers in the debate and the formal debate was re-enacted.

Foreign learners often ask me what ordinary British people think of the monarchy/EU, etc. Newspaper letters and reports of debates are extremely useful in reflecting the huge range of public opinion on such subjects, as well as the range of possible registers.

Project work

At York University Norwegian Study Centre we run three-week courses for Norwegian tertiary learners based mainly on British civilisation and current affairs. All students write projects on a subject of their choice, ranging from 'monopolisation in the media' to 'the sources of the conflict in Northern Ireland'. They therefore require very detailed and very up-to-date information which can be rapidly and easily accessed, and the newspapers on CD-ROM at York University library have proved extremely popular with them. They tend to prefer the ability of the CD-ROM to conduct rapid searches for relevant data to the alternative of ploughing through stacks of books and collections of journals and newspapers. Quotations from articles can also be integrated directly into their word-processed project reports.

How can newspapers on CD-ROM be obtained and how much does it all cost?

You need:

1. An IBM compatible computer.
2. A subscription to a newspaper on CD-ROM. Microinfo give educational discounts on all the papers available on CD-ROM (the most popular are *The Times/Sunday Times*, *The Financial Times*, *The Guardian*, the *Independent*, *The Daily Telegraph*, the *Economist*, *Le Monde*) at prices ranging from £195 +VAT per year for *The Times/Sunday Times*. Normally you receive four CDs per year, one at the end of each quarter.
3. A CD-ROM drive. This can be an internal or external drive and you should ensure that it will work with your computer and run your newspaper on CD-ROM before buying it. A reputable dealer is Optech, and you can pay from £225 +VAT and postage for a Sanyo PD1 drive with educational discount.
4. Someone who knows enough about computers to fit items 1, 2 and 3 together.

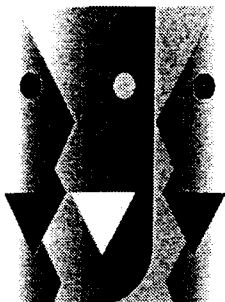
Note: newspapers on CD-ROM are subject to copyright.

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Wida Software, 2 Nicholas Gardens, London W5 5HY
Optech, East Street, Farnham GU9 7XX



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